

PASTORAL TRANSITION AND REVITALIZATION IN THE AFRICAN-
AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCH

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A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Submitted to
New York Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Saint Albans, New York, USA

2018

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2018

ABSTRACT

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As the recently installed pastor of the Community Baptist Church in South Ozone Park, NY, and a member for 35 years, I am faced with the unique challenges accompanying a pastoral succession from within the congregation, following my predecessor's retirement after 50 years. This project will address the issue of leadership succession by implementing a strategy designed to increase the congregation's understanding of the nature, role and purpose of the church, in preparation for the next chapter it will write in partnership with God.

To my wife, Sharon Magwood

To my parents, Clarence Carl Magwood, Sr. and Earnestine Magwood, on whose
shoulders I am standing.

Acknowledgments

It is impossible for me to acknowledge all who have helped me grow through this project, but I must thank:

My Wife, Sharon and my mother, Earnestine Magwood

My Site Team: Rev. Dr. Archie Witsell, Rev. Timothy Mitchell, and Rev. Daryl Frasier

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CHAPTER 1 THE SETTING

The Background

It was 1981, and the sanctuary was filled to the brim with parishioners, dressed in their Sunday's best attire. Second Sundays at Community Baptist Church were always filled with excitement since the youth choirs would be singing that morning. The traditional gospel music of the likes of Inez Andrews' "Mary Don't You Weep" coupled with the majestic but formal anthems along the lines of "Great is the Lord and Greatly to be Praised," normally heard by the operatic and proud senior choir on first Sundays is replaced temporarily by the upbeat, contemporary, hand-clapping rhythms of Walter Hawkins' clever remaking of "Come By Here Dear Lord." First are two rows of school-aged children dressed in red robes, followed by a junior choir and then the teens in burgundy and grey robes processing down the middle aisle while family members proudly look on was a spectacle to behold.

The Community Baptist Church of South Ozone Park, NY was organized in 1949 under the leadership of its first pastor, Rev. Caughman. It began as a mission in the home of its charter members who were already affiliated with the nearby Bethany Baptist Church, and was subsequently granted permission to incorporate as a church. The present structure exists on the corner of 111th Avenue and 141st Street in the neighborhood of South Jamaica, Queens. From its inception, community membership has been composed primarily of African-American families, many of whom were transplanted southerners seeking a better quality of life. It is not quite clear why these men and women, who were

members of a well-established black Baptist congregation, made the conscious decision to form their own community of faith.

The literature informs us that most southerners were either of the Baptist or Methodist faith as a result of the record number of conversions which took place in the south during the Second Great Awakening.¹ Thus, those migrants heading north would have gravitated towards a particular worship style that reminded them of their unique southern religious traditions. In his ethnographic study of Four Corners, a predominantly African-American neighborhood in Chicago, Omar McRoberts noted the difficulty some of the black churches had in accommodating the southern migrants.² It appeared the feelings were mutual as blacks from the south could not adjust to a more formal, and impersonal worship environment, and that this led to the formation of additional churches in the black community. Perhaps this was the case with these members who might have yearned for a worship environment akin to their southern upbringing. Bethany Baptist Church, though considered the mother church to Community, was established in 1927, and its worship may have reflected a more formal, high liturgical style incongruent with their mode of worship.

I had falsely assumed that the migration of southern blacks to northern cities during the early 20th century was the primary catalyst in the mass exodus of whites to the suburbs. However, this transition did not affect Jamaica until the 1950s and '60s during the second wave of migration, not only from the south, but also from existing black ghettos in Harlem and parts of Brooklyn. We find that eight well-known Baptist churches

¹ Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African-American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), Kindle Edition, location 245-254.

² Omar A. McRoberts, *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 29-40.

were established between 1940 and 1970, namely St. Albans Baptist Church (1956), Salem Missionary Baptist Church (1964), St. Luke Cathedral (1965), Majority Baptist Church (1960), Community Baptist Church (1949), Community Baptist Church of Christ (1955), Blanche Memorial Baptist Church (1965), and New Covenant Church of Christ (1959).³

There is very little in terms of ethnographic research conducted in the borough of Queens, relative to what has been extensively documented in Manhattan and Brooklyn, and it would lead one to believe that black people did not exist in Queens until the second migration. It is shameful that this erroneous information is usually mentioned within the context of “white flight” and the beginning of an economic downturn in the southeast Queens community. The US Census Report for 1930 informs us that in Queens, blacks accounted for 1.7 per cent (18, 599) of the total Queens population.⁴ It also shows how small this community was at the time, compared even to the foreign-born residents of Queens such as the Irish (22,659), German (64,007), and Italians (50,307).⁵

It is documented that as a result of the Great Migration, northern communities had to make adjustments due to tremendous population growths in major cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, and New York.⁶ A challenge faced by these congregations involved a willingness to accommodate the unique rural, folk elements of worship that

³ Queens Federation of Churches, “Directory of Baptist Congregations,” http://www.queenschurches.org/Directory/Directory_Welcome.htm (accessed May 23, 2012).

⁴ United States Census Bureau, “Census of Population and Housing 1930,” <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1930.html> (accessed May 22, 2012).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ McRoberts, *Streets of Glory*, 33-40.

southerners were used to.⁷ Many came from smaller congregations where members were individually known by the pastors, and services were marked with regular warm fellowship, as well as emotional, outpourings of worship.⁸ Not all churches were welcoming and viewed these southern practices with disdain. Researchers have noted that a unique urban phenomenon which developed in response to the need to retain images of the south in a new environment was the advent of the storefront church setting.⁹ It has been noted that the flood of African-Americans from the south, and the rich variety of worship styles which existed were right ingredients for the development of a particularistic niche as seen in the plethora of storefront churches which exist in predominantly black neighborhoods.¹⁰ Although this form has been criticized, with images of the “jackleg” preacher who mesmerizes and manipulates for material gain, generalizations should not be made concerning the choices congregations have made historically to utilize available commercial spaces for public worship.¹¹

Oftentimes, a small congregation with limited resources would opt for a storefront as an intermediary or transitional housing space.¹² In fact, there were African-American congregations in Jamaica which began in the homes of one of its members until the group was able to move into a larger space, which made commercial properties a more easily

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Robert L. Boyd, “The Storefront Church Ministry in African American Communities of the Urban North during the Great Migration: the Making of an Ethnic Niche,” *Social Science Journal* 35, no. 3 (1998), www.sciencedirect-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/science/article/pii/S0362331998900027 (accessed May 5, 2012), 319-333.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*, Kindle Edition – locations 2625-2646.

¹² Ibid.

achieved goal. In any event, these men and women chose to break fellowship and form a new community of faith within the confines of a storefront building which sat along 111th Avenue in South Ozone Park. Rev. Caughman and the small, burgeoning congregation of charter members worshipped in this building, and within Community's history, older members would pass down stories of the sense of family and closeness which pervaded and defined them. Rev. James Sherard, Community's second pastor, is credited with providing the impetus to fundraise for the construction of a larger worship space. Both older and deceased members would recount, in story-like fashion, the hard work and dedication of the membership in collaborating to raise enough funds. I would hear of the enormous pride these members had as well as their love for the church.

It was within this context that the Rev. Dr. Archie Witsell, himself a transplanted southerner from South Carolina, relocated with his wife Josephine to New York in 1954, where they joined Community under Rev. Sherard's leadership. Storytelling is an important component of Community's shared history, and stories take on a mythic, legendary quality all to themselves. On numerous occasions, Rev. Witsell would remind the congregation that it was Rev. Sherard who, on his deathbed, declared that he would succeed him as the next pastor. Following his installation in 1964, Rev. Witsell, together with the congregation, resolved to continue the construction of the new edifice, and they were able to march into the new church that year. From discussions with older members, they would smile while recounting the sacrifices the church members made either through numerous chicken dinners being sold or putting up their homes as collateral to secure the loan needed for the construction. One deacon even remarked, "They sold a whole lot of chicken." What is significant is the level of pride and admiration held for

these members who “knew how to work together,” and that “it felt like a family church, then.” This certainly is a reflection of the research on generational differences, as these members acted out of a sense of duty and responsibility. The collective history of Community lovingly speaks of this particular generation as a group who understood what it meant to be members, as reflected in their sincere actions to build, pay for, and maintain their edifice. Members, who are now deceased, would often compare the dedication and faithfulness of this generation to the faithlessness and antipathy of the current membership. From the start of Rev. Witsell’s pastoral leadership in 1964 up until the mid-1990s, Community could boast of more than 200 members, many of whom were either homeowners within a 10-block radius from the church or were living in the recently built Mitchell-Lama co-ops, known as Rochdale Village in South Jamaica.

The first cooperative apartment complex, Rochdale Village opened, offering 80-90 per cent Jewish-American families and 10 per cent African-American families’ spacious and affordable housing units under the Mitchell-Lama Housing Corporation.¹³ From 1903 to 1959, this site had been the home of the Jamaica Race Track, until it was demolished in 1959 due to renovations being made at the Aqueduct Race track in Ozone Park, Queens.¹⁴ Historians note that the migration of southerners waned during the Depression era of the 1930s, and resumed during the 1940s. This event and the post-war boom led to huge population increases in northern cities, as well as a time of unprecedented economic prosperity in the United States. It also signaled the movement of whites who were residents of Jamaica to the suburbs of Long Island.

¹³ Greg Olear, “The Largest Cooperative in Queens: Rochdale Village,” *The Cooperator: the Co-op & Condo Monthly*, <http://cooperator.com/articles/1554/1/The-Largest-Cooperative-in-Queens/Page1.html> (accessed May 22, 2012).

¹⁴ Ibid.

This was also a period where the development of public housing for Jamaica's low-income families took place. In 1940 and in 1954, the South Jamaica I and South Jamaica II (known in the neighborhood today as "40 Projects") apartment complexes were built between South Road and 158th to 160th Streets on one end and 109th and 110th (Brinkerhoff Avenue) Avenues on the other.¹⁵ In all, 27 buildings were constructed to offer approximately 1000 apartment units.¹⁶ It is important to note that these factors contributed to the historic makeup and size of the congregation.

The signage on the front of the edifice describes Community as "the friendly, family church." From speaking with older members, I discovered that, historically, the members promoted a family-typed atmosphere where there was significant concern for the collective needs of the congregation.

Community, like many Baptist churches, prescribes to a congregational form of church polity and practice where power ultimately rests in the hands of the membership. Although there are a printed set of by-laws, Community has always governed itself with the Bible as the authority in all matters of congregational life. Power is shared between the pastor and the members of the collective boards of deacons, deaconesses and trustees, referred to as the Joint Board. Community can be described as a small church with a current enrollment of less than 100 members. Children, ages 18 and under, make up 15 percent of the total membership. Three to five percent fall into the young adult age bracket of 18 through 35. Sixty percent are senior adults, and twenty percent are the adult members aged 35 through 65.

¹⁵ New York City Housing Authority, South Jamaica Houses, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycha/html/developments/queenssouthjamaica.shtml> (accessed May 22, 2012)

¹⁶ Ibid.

Community has a number of auxiliaries where members have opportunities to engage in and develop deep and long-lasting friendships. It is within these auxiliaries where members often provide the most care and support to each other, particularly in times of illness, death, family crises, and significant milestones. Auxiliaries also provide the means by which members can offer meaningful service to the local church body and to Christ.

The Sunday morning worship services are the primary means by which the membership collectively experiences God in worship. Singing is an integral part of the worship services at Community, and close to 50 percent of the membership are active members of one of seven choirs currently in existence. One-third of the membership attends the Sunday school classes offered, although attendance is not always consistent. Teachers' training is provided to enhance teaching competencies and to equip Christian educators for relevant ministry. Community has an active Christian Education department that annually provides vacation Bible school for one week in July for families, as well as quarterly workshops on selected topics. Community is affiliated with the Eastern Baptist Association Congress of Christian Education, as well as the Empire Baptist Missionary Convention where members are trained with the intent to achieve individual transformation in their daily lives, as well as to impact their existing neighborhoods. The majority of the membership does not participate in these Christian educational activities. In spite of the fact that Community offers weekly prayer and Bible study services; the attendance has remained below 5 percent. There exists a continued apathy for any consistent, systemic spiritual study within this congregation, and there also exists an apparent lack of spiritual growth or maturity.

The auxiliaries (missionary circle, pastor's aid, nurses unit, usher board, willing workers, scholarship committee, youth ministry, senior choir, gospel chorus, male chorus, Archie Witsell voices of truth, young adult choir, junior choir, children's choir, women's day committee, men's day committee, South Carolina club, NY-North Carolina club, Georgia-Alabama club, Louisiana club, pastor's anniversary committee, church anniversary committee) design and implement the majority of programs that are placed on the church calendar each year. Usually, these are either annual programs or fundraising events which are sponsored by that particular auxiliary. The state clubs primarily plan fundraising activities towards the church's building fund.

Historically, Community has developed and implemented a variety of outreach programs designed to minister to the needs of the surrounding South Jamaica neighborhood and broader New York City arena. In the by-laws, Community's purpose is stated to "be the advancement of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and the development of native Christians as subjects of the Kingdom. It shall seek to attain this through the public worship of God, the preaching of the Gospel, consistent Christian living by its members, personal evangelism, missionary endeavors and Christian education."

Between 1980 and 1995, Community organized a monthly food program, handing out government-sponsored items to the immediate neighborhood. Through the development of an outreach committee consisting of deacons, Sunday school staff, missionaries, and Christian educators, Community implemented a weekly Children's Reading program at a nearby family shelter in the South Jamaica area. As the mothers began to express interest in their own spirituality, members of the Bread of Life Evangelistic Team were invited to assist with initiating a Bible study class for them on

Tuesday evenings. Deacons and missionaries spearheaded pastoral care ministries at the former Trump Pavilion nursing home (Jamaica, Queens), Queens Hospital Medical Center (Jamaica, Queens), and Mercy Medical Center (Nassau county). Through the direction of the Christian Education department, ministerial staff and deaconesses were involved in an outreach ministry to incarcerated men at Riker's Island. The Mary Jane Sherard Nurses Unit provided yearly first aid and CPR training to the surrounding community. During the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, licensed nurses in Community offered workshops aimed at educating on prevention of the spread of this disease.

However, beginning in the 1990s, Community began to experience a very slow and gradual decline in its core spiritual leadership, attendance, and cohesiveness as a vibrant community of faith under Rev. Witsell's leadership. Several factors may have contributed to this decline. As mentioned earlier, Community was composed mainly of transplanted southerners who journeyed to the north during the historically documented second wave of migration following the close of World War II, in search of prospects for economic prosperity. Additionally, Jamaica, Queens was considered the preferred "suburbs" by many African-Americans who initially had settled in Harlem and parts of Brooklyn, and who were now seeking to move. Rev. Witsell, like so many others before him, migrated from South Carolina to New York during this second wave.

These transplanted southerners were able to secure jobs, buy homes and raise their families. However, as they neared retirement, many began to plan a return to the south, having saved enough to either purchase new homes or have them built from the ground up, so that they could enjoy their retirement years in comfort in the communities in which they were raised. There were other sociological forces at work in the borough of

Queens and New York City, however, which gradually, slowly, and eventually shaped a different and changing landscape of South Jamaica.

Jamaica experienced economic decline in the late '60s and into the '70s with the proliferation of drugs, high rates of crime, and gang violence, most notably by the Seven Crowns, and one of its most notorious members, Anthony Feurtado.¹⁷ Reputable department stores such as Macy's and Gertz closed along Jamaica Avenue, as the neighborhood saw a negative transformation take place. The elevated train track, carrying the J train, which had once opened the doors for easier commuting among Queens, Brooklyn and Manhattan residents, had become a contributor towards an unsafe environment along the shopping district, particularly at night. Conditions did not improve with the crack epidemic which swept in the '80s. Jamaica, Queens became the neighborhood which produced some of the most notorious drug kingpins in New York City, notably Kenneth McGriff, otherwise known by his street-name, Supreme. The mastermind and recognized head of a well-organized gang drawn from the Baisley Park Housing projects in South Jamaica, known as the Supreme Team, Mr. McGriff ran an extensive crack-cocaine drug ring which ravaged African-American families throughout the 1980s.¹⁸

Linked to the Supreme Team was an associate, Lorenzo Nichols, otherwise known as Fat Cat, who, while incarcerated, had ordered the killing of his parole officer,

¹⁷ Lynette Holloway, "Officials Say Gang Broken by 21 Arrests," *The New York Times*, September 30, 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/09/30/nyregion/officials-say-gang-broken-by-21-arrests.html?src=pm> (accessed May 22, 2012).

¹⁸ Department of Justice United States Attorney's Office, Eastern District of New York, Press Release – "Notorious Queens Gang Leader Kenneth 'Supreme' McGriff Sentenced to Life Imprisonment for Racketeering, Double Murder-For-Hire Homicides, Narcotics Trafficking, and Laundering Drug Proceeds," March 7, 2007, <http://www.justice.gov/usao/nye/pr/2007/2007Mar09b.html> (accessed May 22, 2012)

Brian Rooney.¹⁹ The Supreme Team, through the orders of Howard “Pappy” Mason, was responsible for directing the assassination of police officer Edward Byrne.²⁰ This execution-style shooting literally shook South Jamaica and New York City. It occurred not far from Antioch near the intersection of 107th Avenue and Inwood Street, and began when Pappy Mason tried to sell crack on the doorsteps of a Guyanese man’s home.²¹

The homeowner reported Mason to the police, and his home was firebombed in retaliation. As a result, 24-hour police protection was given the homeowner, and this is where Office Byrne was gunned down in his car as he watched the home of this witness.²² This event occurred in 1988 during the height of the crack-cocaine epidemic. The signal this tragic incident sent South Jamaica residents was that no one was safe. As a result, middle-class black families began to move out into relatively safer neighborhoods. The congregation at Community was no exception, and the crack-cocaine epidemic of the ‘80s, coupled with the AIDS epidemic, along with the significant rise in drug crimes and deaths attributable to these events, took its toll on the congregation and community at large.

Within this violent background, Community Baptist Church strongly embraces an evangelical theological model for doing ministry. There is an emphasis on the Bible as authoritative for believers in matters of faith and practice, and it is prominently placed in

¹⁹ Rocco Parascandola, “Convicted Cop Killer Lorenzo ‘Fat Cat’ Nichols Offers ‘Sincerest Apology’ to Victims in Letter,” *New York Daily News*, Saturday, March 27, 2010, http://articles.nydailynews.com/2010-03-27/local/27060169_1_parole-board-parole-officerrookie-cop (accessed May 22, 2012)

²⁰ “20 Yrs. Ago, A Cop Was Shot & NYPD Began Crushing Drug Gang,” *New York Daily News*, Sunday February 24, 2008, http://articles.nydailynews.com/2008-02-24/news/17890475_1_drug-crews-nypd-patrol-car-drug-gangs (accessed May 22, 2012).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

the church's by-laws. However, the extent to which the Bible is viewed by the membership as an important document, worth studying for the purpose of spiritual enrichment, is quite another matter. Doing 'church' continues to be strongly influenced by a historic black Baptist tradition, and the Sunday morning worship experience appears rooted in a transplanted southern cultural expression that remains an integral part of the membership's identity. Therefore, apart from both the Sunday 'experience' and the ongoing fellowship auxiliary affiliation offers, members do not appear as motivated to participate. Membership follows the historical Baptist traditions – on the basis of baptism (by immersion), Christian experience, letter, or watch care. The Lord's Supper is observed monthly on the first Sundays and is closed to those who have not given public confession of their faith in Jesus Christ and have been baptized.

The men of Community Baptist Church have historically played a major role in building and maintaining a strong foundation. Their presence was distinctly felt as they exercised their leadership abilities in providing spiritual leadership through the diaconate, trustee, and Christian education ministries of the church. Men served in providing the church stability and consistency over the years, as well as strong, spiritual leadership. The deacons of Community were men who were spiritually grounded and spiritually astute. They were husbands who raised their families within Community, and were actively involved in the spiritual life and health of the church. Historically, the men of Community were extremely effective in ensuring that the physical property of the church was maintained at a high level, and that a sense of order and discipline was kept in God's house. Generational study analysis may show that these men belonged to a particular

generation chiefly concerned with ensuring that whatever structures were put into place were maintained.

The Current Situation

Community has undergone a significant decline in spirituality, commitment to ministry, church attendance, financial giving, and a sense of family-community which was its hallmark from its inception in 1949. Within this context was the equally challenging prospect of dealing with the retirement of a beloved pastor following a fifty year tenure. Both the need for revitalization and the effects of a pastoral transition became the catalysts for this demonstration project.

Transition brings forward several ecclesiological concerns and questions: What role would the newly retired, long-tenured pastor serve in a very critical moment of leadership transition for the newly installed pastor? Following a long tenure, the retired pastor would need to adjust to a new role within the life of the congregation. To what extent would the new pastor sensitively facilitate this type of transition? How should the new pastor view and/or treat the work and legacy of the retired pastor? How would the new pastor relate to the iconic image of the retired pastor that is already embedded in the hearts and minds of the congregation, and to what extent would this dynamic hinder or help the new pastor in relating to the congregation? How would the new pastor deal with potential “baggage” inherited from the previous pastorate? To flesh this out, how would the new pastor begin to address any underlying administrative issues that have been festering, which were the by-products of the political dynamics at work in the previous pastorate, but which could affect the new pastor’s ability to lead successfully?

Although it was understandable given the severe fiscal circumstances, the net result of constant spiritual neglect resulted in a body of believers who were often

encamped in factions or divisions, and where verbal spats, battles and arguments were more frequent and expected. One of the recurring themes I would hear from members, whether addressing the congregation publically or in private, was the need for the church to show more love, and to work together as one body, supporting each another. This lack of love was characterized by a certain disregard or lack of respect for those in leadership, a disregard for adhering to congregational policies and rules which governed how things should be carried out within the church, and a stubborn insistence to work only with certain persons.

The members would tell you that in Community, people were not shy about saying who they would and would not work with. Thus, there was a need to help these two auxiliaries understand first and foremost that the ministries of the church, and that both men and women of God need to be ministered to, in order to help them more effectively relate to and minister to one another. The spiritual component of each ministry was absent. Additionally, the women's ministry lost their chairperson early in the year, and I remained prayerful and hopeful that the position would be filled in the beginning of the following year by a Spirit-filled woman who cared about the spiritual lives of other women and would make it her focus to facilitate their spiritual growth and both model and build healthy, robust fellowship among the women of Community that would be life-giving and nourishing.

I was also concerned that the men's ministry should be a place where men can work together on both short and long-term projects for the betterment of the church, and become a more cohesive group, encouraging each other to make the concerns of the church their issues, and mentoring the young men within the congregation. Community

has a tradition of strong male figures in positions of leadership who have made lasting contributions to the maintenance and stability of the church over the last 67 years. This was a tradition I wanted the men to reclaim for themselves, for their families, and for the congregation. The joint usher board of senior and junior members had dwindled in size over the last ten years and needed to be revitalized. Ushers were barely able to stand at all doors of the church due to their reduced number, and would frequently have to stand longer than usual. The deacon board needed assistance in the distribution of communion to the sick and shut-ins.

I started my pastorate with six deacons, but by the end of 2015, we could only rely on three. Two deacons started to work on Sundays and a third passed away in October. The deaconesses historically would assist the deacons in carrying out this responsibility, but over time, they stopped performing this role, as the women's chairperson and chairperson of the deaconess board passed away. She was very capable in dutifully fulfilling the tasks as the chair by ensuring that the communion clothes were cleaned, insisting that the deaconesses meet every month, and attending to the needs of any candidates for baptism. Her passing was deeply felt within the congregation.

The missionaries had dwindled in number and most of their members were in their 70s and 80s, and were facing various health challenges. The missionaries were responsible for visiting and maintaining contact with all of the sick and shut-in members. The chairperson was making most of the visits, but even she had setbacks because of her own health issues. The missionaries would also assist at funerals by buying, preparing and serving the repast meals for the bereaved families. The chairperson shared her

concerns that as the members were aging it was becoming increasingly hard for them to meet their responsibilities.

There was a clear need to do outreach and invite the congregation to consider joining this ministry. What was equally apparent was the lack of any sustained, planned, intentional outreach and evangelism activities occurring from any of the ministries.

Community was blessed with a very long history of intentional outreach and evangelistic projects which were designed and implemented in response to the contextual needs of the residents within the Southeast Jamaica community. This included conducting worship services for incarcerated men at Riker's Island, facilitating a reading program for young children and their mothers at a nearby family shelter, providing a senior program five days per week with hot meals, organizing recreational activities and trips, establishing both a little league baseball team and a weekly bowling league on Saturdays, encouraging deacons, deaconesses and missionaries to be trained and certified as chaplains and volunteering their time at a number of hospitals and extended care facilities in Queens and Long Island, and organizing an evangelistic team.

Without attempting to duplicate what has already been implemented, Community needed to be made aware of the demographic changes evident in South Jamaica over the last fifteen to twenty years, which had resulted partially in the decline in membership not only at Community, but in other mainline Protestant denominations. Community needed to seriously consider the fact that the surrounding neighborhood had changed from predominantly African-American families, to a mixture of Caribbean-American, Hispanic, and natives of Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, bringing cultural traditions and religious expressions that included Islam and Hinduism.

Not a single auxiliary had proposed any plans to do any type of outreach activity, but all appeared amenable to focusing on the existing programs within the church. The church was not fulfilling the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 by extending the ministry of Christ beyond the four walls of the sanctuary where the needs of the unchurched lay.

The church was missing out on fulfilling the more prophetic aspects of its black Baptist tradition, neglecting the more nurturing roles the black church had historically assumed. We had no existing GED programs, naturalization to citizenship programs, food pantry or job readiness programs. The church was becoming settled in a “country club” atmosphere where members were surprisingly suspicious of visitors, particularly if they did not look or speak like the majority. Members appeared to be satisfied that they were able to successfully put on programs that benefited the church financially, but there did not seem to be a focus on what the church could actually do for the community in which it was situated.

One of the more disturbing areas of need had to do with the congregation’s perceptions of how their funds were being handled. There was a pervasive feeling of distrust between the congregation and the trustee board which permeated the conversations within the various auxiliary meetings, the informal verbal exchanges made in between the close of Sunday school and the beginning of the worship service, and most pointedly during the discussion during quarterly church business meetings. Depending on who you spoke to within the congregation, there was either something positive or negative to say concerning the integrity and work of the trustee board.

From 2009 to the present, I heard several direct or implied statements concerning the intention to withhold voluntary contributions as a form of protest against what was perceived as “wrong” fiscal policies or decisions. These “boycotts” by several factions within the church were done in order to cause serious financial harm to the church, and forcefully gain a certain level of control regarding how the church was to operate. As a result of a high level of mistrust, which seemed to have its origin in carefully crafted myths rather than any real substantive truth, the various auxiliaries had resorted to an ill-conceived practice of holding onto any funds raised in the name of the church, and then, following a disbursement of expenses, would turn over the monies to the trustee board. There was much work to be done in terms of maintaining a degree of transparency with the congregation regarding the financial health of the church, and I considered the possibility of bringing on additional trustees who could offer financial expertise and assist the group in addressing and resolving some of the more pertinent fiscal issues.

Between March and October 2015, Community lost four of its strong, influential and beloved members within the church as they transitioned from labor to reward: the chairperson of the women’s ministry, the assistant to the pastor, Rev. Witsell’s wife, and the former chairperson of the men’s ministry. As a result, I had to step in to meet with the ministerial staff and to coordinate the preaching schedule from August until December. The elected officers within the women’s ministry were encouraged to continue in carrying out the planned programs for the rest of the year as a working committee, while I prayerfully considered a replacement for 2016.

The women’s ministry chairperson had been dealing with a serious illness, which prevented her from physically being present at church for several months. During this

time, her committee continued to plan and prepare for their annual banquet where they honored some of the women of the church. Her passing March prior to the banquet was deeply felt on the day of the event, and the committee invited her two daughters and presented them with a memorial plaque in recognition of their mother's faithful and dedicated service to the ministry. Not only was it a time to reflect on the legacy of the deceased chairperson, but it was also a time to acknowledge and congratulate the living, breathing women who were present and being honored by their church. In one of my first duties as pastor-elect, I had the privilege to present each woman with a certificate and, as I did so, I took the time to give personal reflections about each one. To me, this was the heart of the occasion, because in this space women could affirm the inherent goodness and worth of their sisters.

It was a very difficult period for the church with each successive death. Rev. Johnson's health began to decline in late April to early May, and he was hospitalized for at least a month. Although his condition improved and he was discharged in June to attend the men's ministry prayer breakfast, a relapse led to a second hospitalization from which he never recovered, and subsequently transitioned in mid-August. Sis. Witsell, Rev. Witsell's wife of 64 years, who died in September, had been confined to her bed for several months and was receiving home care services, until her health further declined and she required nursing home care. She had been away from the church for almost a year at the time Rev. Witsell retired. Finally, the former chairperson of the men's ministry, who was very depressed at the death of Rev. Johnson, suddenly passed away in October.

CHAPTER 2 THE CHALLENGE

Of all the possible issues to address for this project, the swift transition in pastoral leadership and the accompanying challenges it would pose to both the congregation and the new pastor seemed the most urgent to address. The challenge requires both leadership and understanding of the nature of authority in the Black church and compassion to help the congregation to come to terms with the loss, anger and frustration that accompanies one pastoral termination to the point where the congregation can begin to heal and articulate their identity.

For most black Baptist churches in the Southeast Queens neighborhood affiliated with the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A Inc., the change in pastoral leadership comes about with the pastor's demise (or abrupt departure following a vote of no confidence by the congregation). The loss is followed by a period of congregational mourning (usually for one year), with the veiling of the pastor's chair (and subsequent unveiling). A pastoral search committee would be assembled, and the congregation would have the opportunity to hear the candidates preach. The new pastor would be voted in by the congregation, and the candidate would be installed, beginning a new leadership in the church.

Congregational policy would dictate the selection of the chairperson of the deacon board, in whom temporal authority would be given to lead the congregation through the interim period, until the new pastor has been installed. It is at the installation service,

where the chairperson would “hand over the keys” of the church to the new pastor, symbolizing the transferring of authority.

The succeeding pastor, much like an interim minister, must deal with the double challenges of whatever unresolved issues remain, as well as assisting the congregation in “mourning” the “loss” of the retired pastor, and facilitating the congregation’s reflection of their own identity so that both pastor and congregation can move on to write the next chapter of its life together. In addition, the new pastor must now adjust to their role in leading the congregation, whose hearts and minds are still lodged in the memories of the departing pastor, and the congregation must begin to perceive, accept, and work with the vision of their new pastor, whom they always knew but in a newer role. Because of the perceived enormous challenges just raised, it is advised that a congregation hire an interim pastor to assist with these transitional issues in order to help the congregation prepare for the calling of the next pastor.²³ However, when the outgoing pastor chooses a new pastor from within the congregation to succeed him or her, an interim period without pastoral leadership is not created in these circumstances.

William Yon refers to those succeeding pastors, where no interim pastor was called, as the “unintentional interim pastor.”²⁴ Yon argues that had the congregation accepted the help of an interim pastor, it would have saved the congregation the additional grief and stress of dealing with a short-term new pastorate. Yon offered this as clear evidence for recommending that congregations utilize the skilled training and wisdom of an intentional interim pastor to assist congregations in examining these

²³ William A. Yon, *Prime Time for Renewal* (Bethesda: Alban Institute, 1977).

²⁴ William O. Avery, *Revitalizing Congregations: Refocusing and Healing through Transitions* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2002), xvi.

unresolved issues, honestly and thoroughly, in order to help congregations bring closure to one long pastorate, collectively begin to discover and articulate the direction in which they would like to move, and finally to prepare congregations in selecting a new pastor.

There is, undoubtedly, a political dimension at play which cannot be ignored when examining the effect of a pastoral transition within the congregation. What is at stake is the degree to which pastoral authority is accepted and embraced by the congregation. To a greater degree, how the congregation perceives the relationship between the newly installed pastor and the pastor emeritus may play an integral role in the passing of the mantle, as well as the degree to which respect must now be earned by the new pastor. Thus, research would be needed to explore the nature of authority, and an examination of the biblical and theological basis of authority and the transfer of leadership.

CHAPTER 3 LEADERSHIP

The Bible on Authority

My theology of leadership is first and foremost rooted deeply in the character and ministry of Jesus Christ, who best exemplifies and embodies the ideal Servant Leader. The Christ hymn of Philippians 2:5-11 illustrates the kenosis²⁵ or emptying of Christ in putting on the limitations of humanity to stand with humanity, to exemplify in his humanity the rich, abundant and purposeful life that is cultivated in a life surrendered to the will of God, and empowered by his Spirit, and to suffer for the sins of humanity as a humble, obedient, faithful, committed and sacrificial Servant of the Lord.

A God who suffers was not what the patristic writers had in mind during the first three centuries of the early Christian church. For Athanasius and others, the kenosis helped support their argument for the dual nature of Jesus without compromising their Hellenistic understanding of the pre-existent Logos who could assume both human and divine form, and yet remain immutable.²⁶ It was Athanasius who answered both the claims of Gnosticism that the body was evil, and the position of Arius that there was a time when the Son was not.²⁷ “He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God.

²⁵ Bruce L. McCormack, “Karl Barth’s Christology as a Resource for a Reformed Version of Kenoticism,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8, no. 3 (July 2006): 243-251, *Wiley Online Library* <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1468-2400.2006.00212.x> (accessed April 5, 2018).

²⁶ Donald G. Dawe, *The Form of a Servant: A Historical Analysis of the Kenotic Motif* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 50-57.

²⁷ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Press, 1996), 25-28.

He manifested Himself by means of a body in order that we might perceive the Mind of the unseen Father.”²⁸ What remained problematic when we consider the patristic traditions was a concern to emphasize the divinity and unity of Jesus at the expense of His humanity. Athanasius viewed the incarnation solely from a soteriological view, and was clear that Jesus’ humanity in no way affected the impassibility of His divine nature, as he wrote, “He Himself was unhurt by this, for He is impassible and incorruptible; but by His own impassibility He kept and healed the suffering men on whose account He thus endured.”²⁹ This Christology may have been needed to bring resolution to a heated theological debate in the 5th century, but it remained encased in a very abstract, theoretical notion of the nature of Jesus Christ, and failed to provide meaningful substance to how Jesus relates to the daily struggles, suffering, oppression and injustices many experience today. Thankfully, Martin Luther would revisit the self-emptying of Christ and reinterpret the kenosis to emphasize the humanity of God in exchanging the “form of God” for the “form of a servant.”³⁰

This type of introspection on the patristic interpretation of the incarnation has helped me to understand Karl Barth’s conclusion that theologians must go into a different direction, and not think that what was said previously was “the last word.”³¹ It was Barth who articulated that we see and understand the deity of God most clearly in His humanity as displayed in the “context of his history and of His dialogue with man, and thus His

²⁸ Ibid., 93.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 69.

³¹ Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 73.

togetherness with man.”³² James Cone goes even further by emphasizing the historical context of Jesus’ Galilean ministry as recorded in the Gospels.³³ The historical Jesus gives us insight into His Jewish heritage and His understanding of the political and economic oppression His people experienced at the hands of Imperial Rome during the 1st century. J. Cameron Carter discusses Cone’s black Christology in regard to Jesus’ Jewishness when he wrote,

Thus, contrary to the logic of modern racial reasoning, Jesus’ Jewishness is not racially arrayed against non-Jews, because his Jewishness is the perpetual, redemptive sign of God’s embrace of both Jew and non-Jew (in Scriptural parlance, Gentile) alike. In other words, Jesus’ Jewishness is, first and foremost, the enduring sign of the mystery of God’s embrace of the whole of creation.³⁴

Cone’s often misunderstood assertion that Jesus must be “black” for black people who endured slavery, racism, segregation and Jim Crow comes from the identification blacks made with the Jesus they came to know as slaves in the New World who was a “friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

It was this picture of a Suffering Savior within the context of the fiery evangelical message of the Great Awakening that attracted African-American slaves, as they identified with Jesus who hung on a tree.³⁵ It was their identification with Jesus which gave them the strength to persevere and resist the death-dealing blows of Jim Crow and segregation.³⁶

³² Ibid., 74.

³³ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 57-76.

³⁴ J. Cameron Carter, “Christology, or Redeeming Whiteness: A Response to James Perkinson’s Appropriation of Black Theology,” *Theology Today* 60 (2004): 525-539.

³⁵ James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 1-29.

³⁶ Ibid.

This definition of true greatness which Jesus articulated in Mark 10:35-45 provides not only a rebuke of this world's warped and self-centered understanding of power, but also radically invites the reader to consider what Dr. Alfaro best described as powerless power. As a matter of fact, the entire gospel of Mark can be interpreted in view of the themes of both power and powerlessness.³⁷ In other words, to be great is to be a servant of all.

To the first century Palestinians, the Roman Empire, with its vast territorial control, wealth, and military might, symbolized absolute power.³⁸ The narrative of Jesus' earthly ministry, as told by Mark, is immersed in the context of imperial religious, social and economic power waged by Augustus Caesar, with the added layers of Pontius Pilate, Herod and the priestly aristocracy who benefitted from Rome and controlled the Jerusalem temple.³⁹

In the Mark text, we find two of Jesus' disciples, James and John, approaching Him privately with a request. This request, it appears, is the result of an announcement Jesus had made earlier in Mark 10:32-34. This would be the third time that Jesus would announce his impending suffering in Jerusalem and crucifixion. Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem as recorded in Mark 10:32 when He mentioned the fact that He would have to endure suffering and death. It is here that the two disciples request Jesus to allow them to sit on His right and left hand when He enters into His glory.

³⁷ Dorothy A. Lee-Pollard, "Powerlessness as Power: A Key Emphasis in the Gospel of Mark," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40, no. 2 (May 1987): 173-188, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/scottish-journal-of-theology/article/powerlessness-as-power-a-key-emphasis-in-the-gospel-of-mark/66A265327FCA75C9F1DE7E83DD804F5D> (accessed April 7, 2018).

³⁸ Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Powers: Conflict, Covenant and the Hope of the Poor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 17-41.

³⁹ Ibid.

This passage is transitional when seen within the context of the entire span of Mark's gospel. Whatever structure we can make out of this gospel, it can only be agreed that there is currently no real consensus among biblical scholars exactly what that structure is.⁴⁰ The Suffering Servant has now set his face towards Jerusalem with the full knowledge that his hour has now come to be offered as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. His disciples not only misunderstand the chief end of his divine mission, they now, in the persons of James and John, woefully misunderstand the nature and work of Christian ministry. It is Jesus who will ultimately demonstrate the nature of Christian service, for he will give his life as a ransom for many. In fact, he did not come to be served but rather to serve.

Both James and John were granted a unique opportunity to see Jesus transfigured in his glory as recorded in Mark 9:1-10, and perhaps they desired in their hearts to position themselves in the most exalted of positions next to Jesus. Here we see a glimpse of the disciples' need for power and authority, and Jesus utilized this quest for power to actually provide the disciples a lesson on true power.

In his discourse, Jesus harshly rebukes and dismantles our own human conceptions and models of power. Much in the spirit of the Old Testament prophets, Jesus heralds an "alternative consciousness"⁴¹ to the already existing narrative of coercive, domineering power of Rome that permeated and affected the Galilean community to which Jesus ministered. Mark's gospel was written to a gentile, Roman

⁴⁰ Kevin W. Larsen, "The Structure of Mark's Gospel: Current Proposals," *Currents in Research* 3, no. 1 (October 2004): 140-160, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1476993X0400300107> (accessed April 10, 2018).

⁴¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 3.

audience that was accustomed to the constant display of the Roman Empire's authority over the known world. It was clearly an authority that was gained or earned through human conquest and maintained through a trained military and Roman law. It was an oppressive and dehumanizing form of mass control, as those under its rule were held in check through fear and tyranny.⁴² The first century Palestinians were keenly aware of the extent of Rome's authority over their land, their people and their resources.⁴³

Yet it is Jesus who declares that the path to true power does not involve the exertion of military strength, the oppression of the poor and the helpless, and the instillation of fear, but rather the path to true power involves a life of service and suffering on behalf of others.⁴⁴ Jesus looks at James and John and asks them to consider carefully the request they made to him to sit on both his right and left side. Yes, these requests were for positions of power and authority, for to sit at one's right and left hand denoted, during that time, a place of exaltation. However, Jesus challenged their own notions of power and asked them a simple question: can they drink the same cup that Jesus himself must drink? Can they be baptized with the same baptism that Jesus will be baptized? The disciples reply to Jesus by saying that they can, and Jesus affirms this to be true. James will be the first apostle to be martyred for the faith while John will eventually be exiled to the island of Patmos for the word of God. Both will undergo trial and tribulation similar to the suffering of Jesus for they will both endure suffering for the sake

⁴² Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus' Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 50-55.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Howard Clark Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 93.

of the proclamation of the gospel. Yet Jesus disappoints them both with the revelation that these positions which they have requested could only be granted by the Father.

Jesus, in his parables teaches us that it is our Heavenly Father who graciously lends to all His property to diligently care for, and it is the same Father to whom we must give an account for all that he has entrusted to us.⁴⁵ We are given according to His will and we are responsible for how we use the gifts, talents and abilities that he has given us.⁴⁶ The parable of the talents demonstrates the undeniable fact that it is ultimately the Father who grants us greater responsibility depending on how well we were faithful in serving him.⁴⁷ Jesus had to instruct James and John that these positions are only given to those for whom it has been prepared. It is the preparation of a life of service that provides the foundation and prerequisite for where we will be placed by our Father. It is the Father who reminds us to be faithful over a few things, and here we see germinating that the path to power in God's kingdom is unlike the path we see our society taking. For with the coming of Jesus, we see the arrival or in breaking of the kingdom of God, which totally contradicts our earthly notions of power and authority. Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew's gospel chapter 5 with the words, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The kingdom is coming to those who depend entirely upon the Lord and know that their help comes from Him, realizing that they are not worthy of the Lord's favor.

⁴⁵ Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 279-280.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

This attitude of humility stands in stark contrast to the picture of pride, greed and selfishness that Jesus rebukes in his explanation of true power. He tells them that they already see clear examples of how those in authority over their lives exercise power over them. These individuals desire to be the ones in charge who consider themselves the chief, ruling over others. Jesus uses the word “lordship over” in describing what it is these rulers desire to do. This word comes from the Greek meaning to “exercise dominion over,” ‘to bring under one’s power’, ‘to subdue’, ‘to hold in subjection’, and ‘to be master of.’ These terms denote an attitude or approach to leadership that Jesus now brings into question.⁴⁸ If we desire to be great over others, does this greatness mean that we should subdue others, bring others under our control, and hold others in subjection to us? Jesus answers this question in verse 43 where he tells his disciples and soon-to-be-apostles that such shall not be the case among you. Jesus is not just talking to men who have been following him for three years, but he is speaking to men who will one day become spiritual leaders in the church of our lord Jesus Christ, and will need to dismantle and unlearn current definitions of power and authority.

Jesus came to disrupt the current notions of power that were prevalent and entrenched within the fabric of this first century Palestinian culture. Not only did he rebuke the two disciples for their request to be great, his message also sent a rebuke to the other ten disciples who expressed indignation at the request of the two for they would all forsake Him after his arrest in an attempt to escape the path of servanthood and suffering.⁴⁹ He came to deliver a message to the disciples that whoever desires to be great

⁴⁸ Dan O. Via, *The Ethics of Mark’s Gospel: In the Middle of Time* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1985), 158.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

among you, must be willing to be your minister, and whoever desires to be the ruler among you must first become servant of all.

Jesus is inviting all of us to consider our ways in how we exercise leadership whether it is in the church, within our homes, and even on our jobs. Jesus is inviting us, as did the Old Testament prophets to take a good look at ourselves and the manner or style in which we lead others. Jesus declares in Mark 10:43-44 that the greatest among us must be willing to be a servant of all. In the Greek, this word is *doulos* which refers to a slave. Jesus called these men to be servants in verse 43, and the Greek word *diakonos* is fitting in this context, and yet Jesus teaches that the greatest among us must have a mindset of servitude (*doulos*)⁵⁰ echoed in the Philippian Christ hymn where Paul admonishes the church to take on the “mind of Christ.” It was certainly a radical thing for Jesus to invite these men to help them redefine leadership, not as lording over or being others under one’s subjection, but rather as meeting the needs of others.

In doing so, Jesus takes aim at our motives and our hidden agendas for leadership.⁵¹ First, we are not to become leaders to serve our egos. A servant is not waiting to be served, but instead rolls up their sleeves and attends to the needs of others, which is their primary role. Jesus speaks to the fact that we have models of leadership which are not healthy or conducive for the spiritual, emotional and mental health of others. He invites us to take a critical glance at secular leadership that is concerned about the concentration of power and the manipulation and coercion of others for personal aggrandizement. Jesus critiques models of leadership that seek to justify the means by

⁵⁰ Via, *Ethics of Mark’s Gospel*, 158.

⁵¹ Ibid.

looking at the end results, and informing us that using aggressive tactics, and mind control to force groups of people to bend to your will does not work in the long run.

Instead, Jesus invites us in this text to consider new possibilities for leadership where rather than leading over, we are partnering with and serving others with an attitude of humility and mutual respect. This new possibility seems unlikely considering how entrenched our thinking is about leadership. However, it becomes a reality for it began with Jesus Himself. For Jesus declared that the Son of man came not to be minister unto, but to minister and to give his life as a ransom for others. It is Jesus who brings this new possibility because it was Jesus who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal to God. Instead, He made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant. He was made in the likeness of man. Being in this form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death on the cross. In Jesus we find the structure for vibrant alternative models for traditional hierarchical leadership in the body of Christ for we serve a living Savior who has given his life as a ransom for us all. It is Jesus who offers us new ways of being and serving the body of believers that are life-giving and life-nourishing. Jesus' self-emptying becomes the basis or prototype of leadership and service that is concerned with empowering and equipping others for relevant ministry.⁵²

Dr. Efrain Agosto's hermeneutical understanding of the synoptic gospels has informed and shaped my theology of leadership as well. Agosto makes the point of saying that Jesus demonstrated his leadership in first becoming a follower.⁵³ The synoptic

⁵² Via, 158.

⁵³ Efrain Agosto, *Servant Leadership: Jesus and Paul* (St. Louis, MI: Chalice Press, 2005), 31-32.

gospels record Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist, and this indicates that Jesus was willing to follow in John's steps. We know that John took issue with having to baptize someone like Jesus, as he initially objected, but Jesus encouraged him to continue so as to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:13-15). Jesus did not need to be baptized as John's call was a baptism towards repentance, yet Jesus humbled himself. This act of Jesus has implications to us today concerning how we are to lead, and leadership should begin with a posture of being a faithful follower. It would then be expected that potential leaders should have evidenced an ability to follow another's lead. This model of leadership runs counter to what is evidenced in some congregational settings where leaders are selected more so based on who might be in their circle of influence than on any track record of consistent loyalty and faithfulness to an organization.

Agosto points out during the baptism of Jesus that the quality of humility was put on display in John's ability to graciously concede his leadership to Jesus.⁵⁴ This posture of humility for any leader is helpful in facilitating training and preparation for future leadership roles. John the Baptist was called to make preparation for Jesus' coming and this is a characteristic needed for leaders today. What can be discouraging is when existing leaders within the congregation have no intention of relinquishing the positions they hold. Thus, it is highly unlikely that potential leaders are even thought of. The Matthew text provides us with the opportunity to witness John the Baptist not only define the purpose of his ministry, but the temporary nature of his ministry in view of the ministry of the One who was to come after him.⁵⁵ The baptism of Jesus provides us with

⁵⁴ Agosto, *Servant Leadership*, 30-31.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

an affirmation from the Father attesting to the call that has now been placed on the Son.⁵⁶ Agosto's mentioning of how John's ministry involved the passing of the mantle from himself to Jesus provides us with clues regarding how leaders should exercise humility in knowing when to step down so that others can take their place and lead.⁵⁷ It seems here that leadership implies the ability to reproduce other leaders so that the work can be continued.

Jesus leads by calling disciples around him.⁵⁸ Jesus selected those who were from the regions and towns of first century Palestine and under the oppression of Rome. Thus, there was consideration to select people who were not only the direct recipients of his Galilean ministry, but were also directly affected by the harsh economic and political conditions of the time. Jesus selected those who were from the regions and towns of first century Palestine and under the oppression of Rome. What does this tell about the form of leadership in the New Testament? Agosto speaks of the "inclusive" nature of Jesus' ministry and leadership.⁵⁹ In addition to fishermen, Jesus calls tax collectors such as Matthew (Levi) and, as a result, he incurs the criticisms of the Pharisees when he eats in their homes. Along with these fishermen, Jesus calls women who figure prominently in his ministry.⁶⁰ We know this from the women who follow Jesus to the cross and to his burial. They later show up and are first to witness to his resurrection and are instructed to tell the disciples. Written to already existing Christian communities, the synoptic gospels

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Agosto, *Servant Leadership*, 30-31.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 35.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 37.

simultaneously reflect the ongoing prominent role of women in the early church. Agosto makes a point of saying that the people Jesus calls for discipleship are the very ones who form the target of his earthly ministry – the poor, the outcast, the lame, and the marginalized.⁶¹

Within congregational settings, we are usually choosing leaders directly from the pews. These are the same people whom we have been ministering to, and in whom we begin to recognize the potential for leadership roles. Going back to Ephesians 4:11-13, we find Paul reminding the church of the importance of the offices of pastor, prophet, evangelist and teacher in equipping the laity for the work of the ministry and the building up of the body of Christ. Starting with the assumption that believers have been gifted by God, we are responsible for training and discerning God's calling of the membership so that leaders can utilize their gifts. This mode of leadership clearly goes against societal expectations of leadership potential, and affirms the notion that anyone can be trained to function effectively in a leadership capacity. A congregation may tend to gravitate towards the charismatic and naturally gifted while ignoring the masses of congregants who are often overlooked and rarely called upon to serve in a leadership role. Agosto's argument lends biblical and theological support to the inherent leadership potential of the laity.

Even Jesus recognizes that the work of ministry can never be done alone. His statement that the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few fosters the need to engage and train others for Christian leadership. Leaders should never presume that work is to be

⁶¹ Agosto, *Servant Leadership*, 38.

done alone but rather in a collective effort. Jesus' calling of the disciples highlights the importance of teamwork in building successful ministries.

Jesus does not sugarcoat the rough edges of doing ministry and forewarns his disciples so they are prepared to expect bumps along the road. These sharp words of wisdom are the key whenever people are called to serve as a reminder of the sacrificial aspect of discipleship, an aspect that is not always emphasized. Our 21st century notions of what it means to "serve" have come up against humanistic tendencies to preserve our "selves" from blurring boundaries and clergy burnout. This need for self-preservation can contradict the greatest command to love our neighbor as ourselves. Discipleship is not necessarily a call to love others with the same degree of love that we have for our own welfare. We know this to be true because not everyone loves themselves in a healthy manner. I interpret Jesus' call more so as a directive to go against our natural inclination to put our own needs first. The author calls for a type of leadership that demands a willingness to sacrifice and offer service in imitation of Christ's suffering.

Historical Perspectives on the Nature of Authority and Leadership

In having any discussion about clergy authority in the black Baptist church, there needs to be a discussion about the nature of authority itself, and this discussion would properly begin with Max Weber. Weber's views on the nature of authority were wide-reaching in terms of articulating a Western European understanding of the basis of legitimate power. In his seminal book, *Economy and Society*, Weber differentiates the words 'authority' and 'power' on the basis of legitimacy.⁶² Authority is viewed as the

⁶² Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 212-213.

exercise of power that has been granted within the context of a social structure.⁶³ Weber describes three modes of legitimate claims to authority – rational grounds, traditional grounds, and charismatic grounds.⁶⁴ Authority on the basis of legal grounds describes a form of authority which stems directly from a body of rules of law in place which provides the legitimacy of the one exercising authority.⁶⁵ Thus, in Weber’s mind, those conceding to this form of authority do so, not out of personal devotion to or trust in the individual, but rather in respect to the laws that have been established. Authority on the basis of traditional grounds finds its legitimacy rooted in the long-held traditions of the culture, both sociological and religious.⁶⁶ For Weber, the difference here lies in the fact that there is a personal loyalty or devotion to the individual by the group. The charismatic mode describes authority as given on the basis of unique personal qualities that are exceptional in nature.⁶⁷ Sociologist Paul Harrison added a fourth mode of legitimacy when he coined the term, “rational-pragmatic.”⁶⁸ This came about through his researching the American Baptist Association, where he found that the officers within the association had no legitimate authority from the local churches that voluntarily joined, yet they exhibited legitimacy based on their expertise and skill in motivating these independent churches to work together to fulfill common purposes.⁶⁹

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 212-215.

⁶⁵ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 212-215.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Paul M. Harrison, “Weber’s Categories of Authority and Voluntary Associations,” *American Sociological Review* 25, no. 2 (April 1960): 232-237, *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2092628> (accessed March 22, 2018).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Weber, being a sociologist, acknowledged that we do not see pure examples of each of these modes of legitimacy, but only in mixed forms. This theoretical work is helpful in analyzing power structures within the congregation and understanding the conflicts which can arise within these religious bodies. When examining pastoral transitions, one would need to be aware that one's election by the membership and subsequent installation only grants a certain degree of legitimacy in terms of having completed the "legal" requirements within the confines of both the local Baptist congregation and, more broadly, the local Baptist denomination.

However, one cannot rest on this type of legitimacy, in that the newly installed pastor must now prove their worth as a leader to be both trusted and respected. More than the educational credentials and title, the congregation looks for the pastor to demonstrate leadership that they can trust. In this sense, Harrison's rational-pragmatic mode comes into play, as an additional layer of authority. This type of authority is earned rather than granted, and thus would account for the liminal quality of the relationship between the new pastor and the congregation once the "honeymoon period" has ended and the real work of pastoring a congregation has begun. Whether or not a church utilizes the services of an interim pastor, the new pastor will need to recognize that a certain degree of authority must be earned over a period of time as she/he fulfills the roles of preaching, teaching, administering the ordinances of the church and working together with the people of God.

Jackson W. Carroll notes that this authority must be earned over time until it becomes institutionalized.⁷⁰ Carroll discusses the differences between the authority of an

⁷⁰ Jackson W. Carroll, "Some Issues in Clergy Authority," *Review of Religious Research* 23, no. 2 (December 1981): 99-117, *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3511922> (accessed March 22, 2018).

office and the authority of a person. In the case of clergy, there has historically been granted a certain degree of authority in a clergyperson by virtue of their position as the pastor of the local congregation.⁷¹ The pastor is seen as one who is in close contact with the Divine. Carroll notes, however, that, over time, an increasingly more secular (and in today's time, a more post-modern era) climate might tend to challenge a clergyperson's legitimacy as an authority.⁷² Increasingly, the clergy may be expected to prove their worth, and demonstrate a degree of religious authenticity that Carroll calls "authority of the person."⁷³

Weber's typology on the modes of legitimate power implies that any power not granted is illegitimate. This implication becomes problematic when we consider that there may be members within the congregation who are highly influential in terms of persuading other members, yet are not formally or "legally" vested with any authority from the congregation to do so. It is not so much that these members are doing something wrong. It may be that members within the congregation, over time, have granted certain key members a degree of authority based upon their proven record to lead, influence and produce. Thus, the word "illegitimate" might actually be too harsh a word to describe what might better be articulated as "informal" or "congregational authority." Therefore, it is important for the new pastor to be cognizant of the existence of both realms of authority and leadership within the congregation, and that sources of conflict may stem from the need to balance pastoral authority with congregational authority. The autonomous nature of congregational polity places the authority for final decisions in the

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Carroll, "Some Issues in Clergy Authority," 99-117.

hands of the congregation. This, in itself, can limit the scope of the pastor's authority. As the pastor's authority is dependent on what he does, he may not be able to lead the church in directions they are not ready to venture in.

Having explained both the authority of office and person, Jackson W. Carroll discusses the scope of pastoral authority as a third dimension.⁷⁴ The extent of pastoral authority may be codified in the articles of the church's bylaws but, over time, the traditions of past leadership may have allowed for this definition to be expanded. Carroll notes that in the history of the black church, pastors had to be both community and spiritually minded, and filled both priestly and prophetic roles in offering spiritual nurture through preaching and teaching, while also attending to the educational, social, and economic needs of their members.⁷⁵ Carroll correctly describes the increased emphasis on the importance of the personal authority of the pastor, and how cultural, social and political changes have contributed to the gradual de-centering of the church as an influential authority.⁷⁶

Within the context of working with members of an African-American black Baptist church, I am proposing an alternative leadership model, as opposed to current hierarchical paradigms which research has proven to have serious limitations. I will argue for a biblically-based model of leadership which has much support in current trends in leadership theory.

One of the biggest mistakes a person can make is to put together a team that reflects only him. I find it's better to put teams together of people who have different skills and then make all those disparate skills function

⁷⁴ Ibid., 108.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 110.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

together. The real role of the leader is to figure out how you make diverse people and elements work together.⁷⁷

Research indicates that the historic development on a scholarly understanding of the nature and content of effective leadership has been problematic.⁷⁸

Joseph C. Rost has noted three contributing factors. First, scholars from a variety of academic disciplines have been consistent in focusing on what he calls the “peripheral”⁷⁹ elements of leadership theory. In other words, there has been considerable focus, since the 1930s on the particular characteristics or traits which could predict with some degree of certainty the likelihood of someone succeeding in a leadership position.⁸⁰ Rost refers to this focus on the peripheral elements as an emphasis on the content of leadership.⁸¹ Rost contends that much was made of the importance of the ‘content’ as opposed to the relational aspects of leadership because of academia’s preference to study what could be observed, measured, verified, and ultimately reproduced.⁸² Second, Rost argues that there has been no consensus on an agreed-upon definition of leadership, and that the multidisciplinary nature of leadership allows for the acceptance of a wide variety of views and perspectives on what leadership exactly entails.⁸³ Rost makes a third point in quoting Burns’ lament over the “failure of scholars and practitioners to develop a more readily recognizable school of leadership that integrates what we know about

⁷⁷ Warren G. Bennis, *On Becoming A Leader* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 100.

⁷⁸ Joseph C. Rost and James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 1.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 3-6.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

leadership...a school of leadership that frames an understanding of leadership that makes sense to people who want to study leadership and put the concept to work in organizations, societies and the world.”⁸⁴

James McGregor Burns, in one of his classic leadership books, states that “leadership is the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth,”⁸⁵ and Warren Bennis, who authored a classic book on leadership, notes that there are over 850 definitions of leadership, that “leadership is like beauty. You cannot quite define it but you know it when you see it.”⁸⁶

Within the context of the African-American black Baptist church, there is concern that pastors who are recent seminary graduates perceive a lack of administrative training as preparation for the multidimensional demands of 21st century pastoral leadership. Kirkpatrick Cohall and Bruce Cooper note that black Baptist pastors working in urban contexts where communities routinely face issues of unemployment, high crime and drugs realize the need for leadership preparation beyond the confines of preaching, teaching and administering the ordinances of the church.⁸⁷ Pastors in these contexts are challenged to serve as the representatives of both the political and socioeconomic issues of their communities in an effort to address these issues as they impact individuals and families.⁸⁸ The research indicates the perception that seminaries are not addressing these

⁸⁴ Rost and Burns, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, 9.

⁸⁵ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2012), 1.

⁸⁶ Bennis, *On Becoming a Leader*, xxix.

⁸⁷ Kirkpatrick G. Cohall and Bruce S. Cooper, “Educating American Baptist Pastors: A National Survey of Church Leaders,” *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 19, no. 1 (2010): 27-55, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 23, 2018).

⁸⁸ Ibid.

challenges in their curriculum, and thus pastors may experience early burnout, retirement, or vocational dissatisfaction as a result.⁸⁹

Given these circumstances, a hierarchical model of leadership does not appear particularly inviting, considering the enormous weight of responsibilities congregations place on what pastoral leaders are expected to both know and do. Bruce J. Avolio and Bernard M. Bass point to the fact that executive directors have realized the costs involved in leading others from a more traditional, top-down approach.⁹⁰ In the twenty-nine case studies covered, the authors found that executives discovered value in creating a work environment that emphasized seeing staff grow in their roles as leaders.⁹¹ There was a consensus that as one moved up the corporate ladder, it became increasingly more difficult to complete tasks without the ability to collaborate with other staff and delegate responsibilities.⁹² Collaboration became a way for executives to gradually relinquish a more “hands-on” approach of the day-to-day responsibilities while still remaining connected in some sense. Avolio and Bass also mention the need for executives to remove themselves from the managerial aspects of their jobs so that they could focus more attention on communicating the vision of the organization, setting the tone for how this would be achieved and inspiring the staff to meet the goals set by the organization.⁹³

One sees the paradigm shift from a transactional form of leadership where one’s worth is negotiated through an exchange between the followers and the leader to a

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Bernard M. Bass and Bruce J. Avolio, eds., *Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994).

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 39.

⁹³ Ibid.

transformational approach to leadership where the focus centers on a process to change and transform followers into leaders; and that transformational leadership is about personal development, and this type of development assures that growth can be sustained.

According to Robert Maxwell, leadership reproduction is viewed as one the highest priorities of leadership. However, this will not occur as long as leaders continue to do all the work themselves, or are insecure about their positions. Maxwell provides a quite humorous example of the leader as “plate spinner” who exercises enormous energy, yet the plates will come to a stop once the energy has been expended. Such is not the case, theoretically, for a leader who has invested considerable time into “people development.” It is the relational aspect of leadership which, in Maxwell’s view, produces trust which, in turn, fosters collaboration.⁹⁴

John Kotter informs us in his book, *Leading Change*, that the shift from a more hierarchical style of leadership to a more democratic or egalitarian approach was not an easy one.⁹⁵ Executives would describe their staff as a team, in theory, but would revert to the existing top-down approach to management.⁹⁶ Kotter notes that between 1975 and 1990, business industries subscribed to the model of executives making decisions by themselves following consultation within higher levels of management.⁹⁷ This model was successful mainly due to the stable market at the time. However, in today’s volatile climate, it is dangerous to assume that any kind of major change will succeed on the

⁹⁴ John C. Maxwell, *The Five Levels of Leadership: Proven Steps to Maximize Your Potential* (New York: Center Street, 2011), 229-270.

⁹⁵ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 55-57.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

ingenuity and charisma of a single individual.⁹⁸ Kotter speaks to the fact that achieving such change can only occur through the work of effective coalitions or leadership teams, since individuals, by themselves, cannot possibly be responsible for repeatedly and consistently communicating a clear vision to all departments, set realistic short and long-term goals, and hold everyone accountable.⁹⁹

This involves the coalition of a group of individuals who are willing to work together as a team. Teamwork requires the ability of group members to be willing to trust one another. Lencioni stresses the importance of trust as a factor in building a successful coalition.¹⁰⁰ Lencioni describes trust as the ability of team members to be willing to be vulnerable.¹⁰¹ In a sense, Lencioni makes an appeal for a more ethically-based form of leadership.¹⁰² He, along with Maxwell, point to the need for leaders to lead by being ethical role models.¹⁰³ Leaders should be the first who are open to their own vulnerability, in order to expect this same characteristic to be displayed in others.¹⁰⁴ In doing so, both support the servant leadership model espoused by Robert K. Greenleaf.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 51.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 19-72.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002).

Historical Perspectives on the Nature of Pastoral Transitions

The interim period of time that occurs in congregational settings between the two pastoral transitions is considered a “critical moment”¹⁰⁶ in the life of the congregation, to borrow the phrase used by author and pioneer Loren B. Mead, who researched fifty-three separate instances of pastors who left and new pastors who arrived. Mead noted that at this juncture congregations are usually ripe for change. That change can result in either a successful transition with new opportunities for growth or increased discontent between clergy and laity, leading to an abrupt resignation or forced termination.¹⁰⁷ Mead’s finds that for the sake of both the new incoming pastor and the existing congregation, it would be beneficial if an intentional interim pastor serve during this critical period. Their role would assist in helping the congregation to mourn the departure of one pastor, address any unresolved issues during the previous pastorate, facilitate discussion with the congregation regarding their perceived identity as a collective body, and ultimately prepare the congregation for new pastoral leadership.

Research on the interim period focuses on three main areas that comprise the unfolding drama of this critical moment in the congregation – the outgoing pastor, the congregation, and the newly installed pastor. The interim period usually begins when the pastor initially informs the congregation of his/her departure, but a sudden or unexpected departure whether by death, scandal, or a long-standing strained relationship between pastor and congregants can become the catalyst for the start of the interim. Mead notes

¹⁰⁶ Loren B. Mead, *A Change of Pastors...and How it Affects Change in the Congregation* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2005), 20.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, x.

that because the congregation's life is directly shaped by the pastor's leadership and presence, the interim can become a very unique period in the life of the congregation.

The Alban Institute and the Interim Ministry Network developed out of the extensive work that Mead, Yon and others did on enlisting and training seasoned pastors to be able to step into the life of a congregation in transition, facilitating crucial developmental stages in a congregation's move from loss and grief over the previous pastorate to a newfound sense of identity and a readiness to accept the call of a new pastorate. Whether a congregation chooses to select an interim pastor or not, knowledge of these developmental stages becomes essential for the new pastor to be aware of and accept, so that he or she can more accurately assess the initial resistances to change, the dogged determination to hold on to the preceding pastor's memory and legacy, the hidden and overt forms of conflict which arise, and the slow, gradual building of a trust relationship between the new pastor and congregation, not as the "fire and the fury" or "hell on earth" but rather as a collection of symptoms more indicative of a local congregation's reaction and gradual adaptation and adjustment to what normally occurs during an interim period.

Intentional interim ministry is well-documented in the literature, and is described in detail by author Alan G. Gripe, who wrote a manual for the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., consistent with the denomination's Book of Order, on the specific duties and responsibilities of an intentional interim pastor.¹⁰⁸ Gripe explained that an interim pastor should be called in cases where the congregation is dealing with the loss of a particularly long pastorate, but also in instances where there were significant unresolved problems or

¹⁰⁸ Alan G. Gripe, *The Interim Pastor's Manual* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1997), 1-12.

interpersonal conflicts from the previous pastorate that must now be addressed and worked through.¹⁰⁹

Oswald, Heath and Heath specify three gradations of interim ministry models which are currently at use: the supply ministry, the interim ministry, and the intentional interim ministry. The supply pastor is called upon to conduct regular and special services, and to provide for pastoral visitations, but nothing more. The supply pastor is not expected to make any changes whatsoever during the interim period. The interim pastor would do much the same, with the addition of meeting regularly with the board and the various ministries. The interim pastor would fulfill the usual pastoral duties by preaching weekly, administering the sacraments, teaching, and conducting pastoral visitations, while the congregation and session actively seek a permanent pastor. The intentional interim pastor would have the added responsibility of dealing with and assisting the congregation in resolving whatever issues have remained following the outgoing pastor's departure. Additionally, the intentional interim pastor would be empowered to make any necessary staffing changes.

Gripe is keen to point out that the interim pastor should be aware from the start that they are not to be considered as a possible candidate, so as to remain within a neutral position in order to address issues and not take sides. This position of objectivity allows the interim to examine the life of the congregation with fresh eyes, and a trained interim with years of pastoral experience can help the congregation to clarify the new directions in ministry which the congregation would now have opportunity to consider (particularly

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 8-9.

in cases where there was a lengthy pastorate) in order to identify the qualities they are looking for in selecting a new leader.

Where pastoral succession occurs from within, as in the case of Community, a congregation may not view interim ministry as a viable option, as the ordained minister from within is not only readily known to the congregation, but also allows the congregation to experience a transfer of pastoral leadership in a more seamless manner, without having to undergo the stresses and strains that may occur during a vacancy period. A whole new set of challenges are posed to both the new pastor and the congregation, which may partly explain why some congregations may opt for selecting a new pastor outside of the congregation. First, the congregation may feel that the new pastor may bring a set of personal biases that have collected during their time as a member, and may not be able to objectively examine and address unresolved issues. Secondly, the congregation might view the new pastor's "insider status" as a hindrance to their ability to garner respect from the congregation as their new shepherd. Thirdly, the new pastor's previous long-time affiliation with the congregation could actually work against him/her in the sense that "familiarity breeds contempt."

There is ample evidence from the biblical witness to attest to the challenges of a new leader emerging from within the family/community/social construct as evidenced by Joseph's brothers and their reactions to his dreams, David's brothers and their reactions to his willingness to fight the Philistine giant Goliath, and the response of the Nazareth community in hearing Jesus declare that the words of Isaiah 61 are fulfilled in their hearing. It may be a natural response.

There is also an integrity factor that would necessarily exclude the interim pastor from being considered. The very fact that the interim pastor would be spending at least one to two years working very closely with a congregation places the interim pastor at an extreme advantage over any other candidate should the interim suggest interest in the position. Additionally, the interim could potentially exert undue influence over the pastoral search selection process. At the onset, the interim pastor should be clear with the congregation that he/she has no intent to apply for the position at some point in time, and it should be clearly communicated to the congregation the defined roles, expectations, and limitations of the interim pastor. Research has proven that congregations in need of a pastor will undoubtedly turn to and strongly consider the interim as a potential candidate, particularly if he/she has been successful in resolving some of the more salient issues, and guiding the congregation through the uncertainty of their future as a church.

Having worked closely with both the leadership and the laity of the congregation, the interim may develop trusting relationships with the parishioners which, in turn, may bolster members of the congregation to encourage the interim to apply for the position. For the interim to accept could have dire consequences for both him/herself and the congregation. The interim should agree to serve for no longer than 12 months and be sensitive to the congregation if they were to encourage the interim to consider filling the vacancy. Oswald, Heath and Heath advocate at least 18 months, but no longer than 24 months. Gripe is of the opinion that congregations dealing with pastoral transitions stand a better chance of maintaining a degree of stability and continuity during the transition, but also stand to gain a more successful and longer lasting new pastorate by ensuring a better match between pastor and congregation.

The importance of the role the interim pastor plays underscores how critical this “in-between” time is for a congregation without a pastor. The literature speaks to the initial shock and anger that parishioners may experience when their beloved pastor announces their retirement. Congregations need to find ways to bring closure to a long-term pastorate. The literature suggests that it is beneficial for the congregation to create opportunities to contemplate where they have been as a community of faith and how the Lord has shaped their identity up until this point.¹¹⁰

Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree employ the biblical model of Jesus speaking favorably of his predecessor, John the Baptist, to highlight that for a new pastor dealing with a congregation in the midst of transition, it is critical to acknowledge and celebrate the legacy of one’s predecessor.¹¹¹ They advise new pastors neither to minimize nor deny the enduring presence of the past, but to learn how to listen to the stories the members tell, as retelling the past can be conducive for bringing healing over the loss of the predecessor.¹¹² Crandall suggests to the incoming pastor that one of the most important steps they can take at the beginning is to celebrate and honor the work that has already been done. Secondly, they need to pay careful attention to what their congregations are saying so that they can discern where the Spirit is leading and to help build mutual trust.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken About Pastoral Transitions* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 1-5.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ron Crandall, “Turnaround and Pastoral Transitions,” chapter 7, *Turnaround and Beyond: A Hopeful Future for the Small Membership Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008).

Wesley highlights the role of the pastor as leader and states that strong leadership is what is needed in times of congregational change. He then mentions that there is a difference between positional leadership and functional leadership. New pastors must learn that congregations need time to develop trust in the pastor before conceding to their authority to lead them.¹¹⁴ Not only is the interim period between pastors an opportunity to glance backwards, but it is also a time to critically discern how to move forwards.¹¹⁵ Roger S. Nicholson points out that the interim period becomes a unique opportunity where the congregation can take a step back and critically look at themselves as in a mirror to examine where they have come from, and where they would like to go.¹¹⁶

The interim period becomes a juncture where the congregation can ask themselves collectively, “Who are we?” It also becomes a very unique moment in the life of the church where the congregation can also ask themselves, “Where are we going?” The interim period can be an opportunity for reflection, but it can also be a very uncertain and unsettling time for the membership whose lives have been intertwined intimately with a singular figure: one who baptized their family members, presided over weddings, embraced and comforted in times of tragedy and loss, offered counsel, and was a constant figure of stability and dependability in their lives.¹¹⁷ As previously mentioned, the loss of

¹¹⁴ Michael W. Wesley, *When God Changes a Church* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2010), 52.

¹¹⁵ Roger S. Nicholson, “The Challenge of the Interim Time,” in *Temporary Shepherds: A Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry*, ed. Roger S. Nicholson, 2-13 (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: An Alban Institute Publication, 1998), 7.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹¹⁷ Roger S. Nicholson, “The Characteristics of an Interim Congregation,” in *Temporary Shepherds: A Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry*, ed. Roger S. Nicholson, 14-25 (Blue Ridge Summit, Pennsylvania: An Alban Institute Publication, 1998), 14.

a long-tenured pastor can lead to disruption in the congregation's life cycle, which can produce shock, grief, anger, denial, disappointment, and uncertainty.¹¹⁸

Nicholson notes that the loss of a pastor can be akin to the loss of a deeply revered family member.¹¹⁹ Even if members did not perceive the work of the previous pastor to be effective, the loss of his presence can evoke feelings of anger and grief.¹²⁰ Nicholson describes this interim period as a time where congregational conflicts will inevitably rise; some conflicts will remain hidden while other issues will come to the surface.¹²¹ Some of the conflict will stem from how the congregation perceives new pastoral leadership. Nicholson advises that it is important that these issues are addressed sooner than later. When certain members have hidden agendas, these facts need to be brought to the attention of the entire membership in order to increase trust among members and reduce dysfunction. Otherwise, the resentment can fester and will impede the congregation from progressing beyond their past and present concerns.¹²²

Although the congregation in transition can be thrown into a state of mourning, particularly following the ending of a long pastorate, it should not be assumed that the congregation is entirely dysfunctional due to a collective illness. In fact, Weese and Crabtree argue that, during the interim period, a focus should be made on building on the health of the congregation,¹²³ which I found closely akin to the strength perspective in

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 14-16

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 15.

¹²¹ Ibid., 15-18.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Weese and Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom*, 1-5.

social work theory. It is possible to spend so much of one's energies focusing on the number of problems to be worked through, that one can miss out on identifying and helping the congregation to appreciate the skills, experience and wisdom that have sustained them as a local church body even during the liminal interim period.

Loren Mead measured the interim period from the moment the previous pastor announces his/her departure through the selection of a new pastor to the point where both pastor and congregation begin to align with each other. Mead's "trajectory of ministry"¹²⁴ is a moment when pastor and congregation are working together in ongoing dialogue which becomes the stage at which authentic ministry occurs. In this trajectory, both pastor and congregation are beginning to learn from each other and both are growing. This depends on whether the pastor and congregation are willing to listen to each other and "strong enough to confront each other."¹²⁵

While there is much in the literature concerning the value of considering an interim pastor to cover the period of time the congregation will not have a pastor, it should be noted that this particular concept is not always clearly defined, taught, promoted and fully embraced by the churches which comprise the National Baptist Convention, USA Inc.¹²⁶

The NBC official website does not articulate a clear, detailed description of the duties and responsibilities of the interim pastor. Although the website attempts to respond to the question of what those duties and responsibilities are, it directs the reader to their

¹²⁴ Mead, *A Change of Pastors*, 13.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ National Baptist Convention USA, "Pastor and Other Clergy Frequently Asked Questions," <http://www.nationalbaptist.com/resources/church-faqs/pastor-clergy-faqs.html> (accessed March 15, 2018).

local church's constitution and bylaws for a more detailed description.¹²⁷ If, for whatever reason, the bylaws are lacking in this detail, the NBC advises the reader to speak with either the chairman of local deacon board or the pastoral search committee for guidance, and as a last resort, to contact one's local Moderator or State Convention President.¹²⁸ The website does offer guidance in instances where a local church has engaged the use of an interim, and the interim, at some point, expresses an interest in applying for the position of pastor. In this case, the NBC explains, on the one hand, that interim pastors are usually excluded from consideration from pastorates in which they serve, but on the other hand, allows instances where the local pastoral search committee approves such a request. The NBC advises the local church to immediately remove the interim from their current position and to place the now potential candidate in the regular rotation of ordained clergy applying for the position.¹²⁹ Wisely, the NBC includes a disclaimer in the "Frequently Asked Questions" section of the website to affirm that when no formal policy position has been delineated, the Convention will only offer "informal guidance."¹³⁰

This disclaimer, perhaps, is more a reflection of the congregational nature of the Baptist faith, in which the authority "properly" rests within the local congregation and neither regional nor national Baptist associational bodies can ultimately dictate. To be sure, the Presbyterian, Lutheran, Episcopal, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), United Church of Christ, United Methodist, and American Baptist associations all have

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

written policies relating to the use of interim pastors.¹³¹ The Assemblies of God, although they do not have an operating interim ministry, have surveyed the churches in their association and the consensus has been that there is a need for this ministry.¹³² The Reformed Church in America does not use the wording “interim pastor,” but their policy manual relating to churches in transition and the support provided by the denomination mirrors the duties and responsibilities of an interim consistent with the body of research on pastoral transitions.¹³³

However, the concept of providing a temporary ordained minister to serve when churches are between pastors does not appear to be a part of the history of the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. As one of the largest black denominational bodies in the United States, Baptist churches affiliated with the NBC have not historically, nor do they currently, participate or embrace as policy and practice the use of interim pastors.

¹³¹ Presbyterian Church USA Office of the General Assembly, <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/ministers/interim-pastors/> (accessed March 15, 2018); Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, http://lcmsed.org/diyFiles/Call_Guidelines.pdf (accessed March 15, 2018); Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Interim_ministry_sample_contract.pdf?_ga=2.211143121.552255629.1521143446-678938939.1521143446 (accessed March 15, 2018); the Episcopal Church, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/document/interim-ministries-book-1> (accessed March 15, 2018); United Methodist Church, <https://www.gbhem.org/clergy/district-superintendents/interim-ministry> (accessed March 15, 2018); American Baptist Churches, <http://www.interimministries-abc.org/About/default.aspx> (accessed March 15, 2018); United Church of Christ, <http://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/S-C-Guide-for-Supply-Pastors.pdf> (accessed March 15, 2018); Christian Church Disciples of Christ, <https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/clergy/christian-vocation-intentional-interim-ministry/> (accessed March 15, 2018) .

¹³² David L. Bittinger, “Healthy Pastoral Transitions Equal Healthy Churches for the Future,” *Assemblies of God Enrichment Journal*, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200702/200702_090_healthytrans.cfm (accessed March 15, 2018).

¹³³ The Reformed Church in America, “Classis Supervisor Resources: Pastoral Transitions,” <https://www.rca.org/resources/classis-supervisor-resources-pastoral-transitions> (accessed March 15, 2018).

Historical Perspectives on the Black Baptist Church

The reasons that Community Baptist Church historically did not prescribe to the use of an interim pastor can partially be explained by the cultural and sociological factors which shaped the development of black Baptist churches in Southeast Queens during the period following World War II. Community Baptist Church is a product of the evolution of the Black Baptist church, whose roots are deeply entwined in the American Baptist church tradition and the tenants of religious liberty, freedom of conscience, and separation of church and state. Perhaps the enduring and defining mark of the Black Baptist Church is the right to be autonomous.

Scholars agree that the Baptist denomination began with the British Puritans, considered Separatists from the Church of England, who rejected both the notion of a parish congregation and pedobaptism (infant baptism).¹³⁴ This seventeenth century radical sect insisted on defining the true church as a body of believers who desired to covenant with God on the basis of their professed faith in Jesus Christ.¹³⁵ The leader of this group, John Smyth, desired to purify the already established Anglican Church, and bring it into alignment with his own hermeneutical understanding of the New Testament church.¹³⁶ What set Baptists apart from other denominations at the time of its inception was an unswerving commitment to the Bible as the final authority in all matters spiritual and

¹³⁴ James Melvin Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 3-7.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³⁶ Anne H. Pinn and Anthony B. Pinn, *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 1.

practical and a unified insistence on a believer's baptism following a confession of a regenerated heart.¹³⁷

Religious persecution by James I of England forced Smyth along with Thomas Helwys to flee with this small Puritan congregation to Holland.¹³⁸ Here, Smyth asked the group to renounce their infant baptisms, and after he baptized himself, he proceeded to baptize the others.¹³⁹ The first Baptist church was formed, and the group wrote their own confession of faith, having embraced the doctrine of general atonement espoused by Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius.¹⁴⁰ This doctrine was in opposition to the accepted Reformed doctrine of limited atonement developed by John Calvin which taught that Christ died only for an elect group of individuals and not for the whole world. Thus, this first Baptist church considered themselves General Baptists, believing that Christ had died for the whole world, and that it was humanity's free will, along with God's providence, which brought individual salvation.¹⁴¹

Smyth and his followers did not practice immersion, but instead had water poured over their heads three times in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism by immersion did not start until 1641.¹⁴² Helwys and a group of dissenters eventually left Smyth and returned to London to form the first Baptist church there in 1611. A second

¹³⁷ Albert Henry Newman, *A History of the Baptist Churches in the United States* (New York: Christian Literature, 1894), 1-2.

¹³⁸ Bill Leonard, *Baptists in America*, Columbia Contemporary American Religion Series (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 8.

¹³⁹ Leonard, *Baptists in America*, 8.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Pinn and Pinn, *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History*, 63-64.

¹⁴² Leonard, 8.

group of Baptists began forming in England during the 1630s. They were Puritan Separatists, but prescribed to the Reformed doctrine of limited atonement, and were known as Particular Baptists.¹⁴³

Roger Williams, a British-born ordained Anglican priest, who turned to Puritan Separatism and eventually fled England with his wife, is credited with starting the first Baptist church in America in 1639.¹⁴⁴ Like the Puritans of 1620, who set sail and landed in Plymouth, Williams left England in search of religious liberty and freedom of conscience. Williams initially settled in Plymouth and Salem, but was forced to leave due to his extreme view of complete separation from the Church of England, which he considered to be an apostate church.¹⁴⁵ Having befriended the native Narragansett Indian tribe, he purchased a piece of land from them and settled with this new congregation in a territory he called Providence, which later became the colony of Rhode Island.¹⁴⁶

The growing numbers of African slaves were drawn to and converted in large numbers by the work of Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist preachers during the period of the Great Awakening in the United States beginning in 1740.¹⁴⁷ It was a period of religious revivalism which spread throughout the south, primarily through traveling ministers such as George Whitefield, Gilbert Tennent and Jonathan Edwards, preaching a Protestant, evangelistic message with a style and fervency which caught the attention of

¹⁴³ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴⁴ Newman, *A History of the Baptist Churches*, 59-77.

¹⁴⁵ Leonard, 14.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: the "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 128.

African slaves.¹⁴⁸ The emotional intensity of the preaching, coupled with the visual conversion experiences reported during these camp meetings, aligned with the African slaves' cultural tradition.¹⁴⁹ Through missionary expeditions in the south, black Baptist and Methodist church memberships rapidly increased.¹⁵⁰

During this period, there were opportunities for blacks to become preachers, even preaching to whites as well as blacks. For a brief moment, similar to the Azusa Street revival in the 1900s, the color line was broken and there was a momentary feeling of egalitarianism.¹⁵¹ This was short-lived as white slave owners waged control over their new converts by ensuring that they were preached a message of the gospel which emphasized their duties to their slave masters, while prohibiting any form of meeting together apart from whites for fear it would lead to plans for slave uprisings.

Thus, it can be argued that the progressive evolution of black Baptist converts from worshiping with their white counterparts in separate spaces of the sanctuary, to having their own spaces and being preached to by their own people was an act to free themselves and declare their independence from control by whites. Baer and Singer argue that the autonomy of the Baptist church led to the rise in large numbers of independent Black Baptist churches.¹⁵²

Knowing this, and understanding the foundational tenet of the Baptist church to have complete autonomy from any ecclesiastical body, whether local, regional, or

¹⁴⁸ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 128-132.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Hans A. Baer, *African American Religion: Varieties of Protest and Accommodation*, 2nd ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 15.

national, one could further argue that just as Martin Luther was concerned about Rome's influence, so black Baptists were concerned about the perceived need for whites to direct the course of their churches. A number of black Baptist churches formed during the period of the antebellum South under the watchful eye of a white ecclesial authority.¹⁵³

George Liele, a black slave converted through the influence of these fiery revivals, founded the first African-American Baptist Church known as the Silver Bluff Baptist Church in South Carolina.¹⁵⁴ Liele was owned by Henry Sharpe, who served as a deacon in the Buckhead Creek Baptist Church. Following his conversion in 1772, he was ordained to do missionary work to slaves in neighboring plantations. Liele is credited with the conversion of Andrew Bryan in Savannah, along with other slaves in this area, which became the first black Baptist Church in Georgia with Bryan as its pastor.¹⁵⁵

Gilbert notes how the black preacher/pastor emerged gradually from the Great Awakening period through Reconstruction.¹⁵⁶ The fiery evangelical messages captured African-Americans in ways the Anglican missionaries never could. The message itself spoke to the need for a conversion of the soul, and was egalitarian in its approach by leveling the field of slave owner and slave by making sin the great equalizer. African slaves were drawn to Baptist and Methodist revival meetings and the denominations saw dramatic increases as a result. Black slaves were mingling with whites momentarily in a

¹⁵³ Pinn & Pinn, *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History*, 67-73.

¹⁵⁴ Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship*, 9.

¹⁵⁵ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Negro Church: Report of a Social Study Made Under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of The Eighth Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at the Atlanta University, May 26th, 1903* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta University Press, 1903), 111.

¹⁵⁶ Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 1.

common fellowship, and Black slaves were found preaching to each other as well as to whites. Following the end of slavery in the south, there was an increase in the numbers of independent African American churches.¹⁵⁷ The failure of Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow forced freed African Americans to leave fellowships of white congregations and start their own where they could freely worship and direct the course of their congregational lives without segregation and racial discrimination.¹⁵⁸

Historian Paul Harvey notes the psychological devastation the Civil War and subsequent Reconstruction efforts had on the southern Baptist churches.¹⁵⁹ Resentment had increased for the North's antislavery movement, and the work of northern missionaries was reinterpreted as an undermining of both the US Constitution and God's view of the natural hierarchy of the races.¹⁶⁰ Meanwhile, pastors of southern white churches looked for ways to provide their members with theologically-based reasons to explain why God had abandoned them.¹⁶¹ However, these explanations were not convincing, and recasting their defeat in terms of some momentary suffering would later give way to triumphalist expectations about their future.¹⁶² Eventually, southern Baptists would encourage the promotion of a white supremacy ideology by way of their concerted

¹⁵⁷ Du Bois, *Negro Church*, 111.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925*, Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 23-24.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 23-24.

resistance to the perceived liberal theology of the northern churches and the idea of racial egalitarianism.¹⁶³

One of the results of the newfound freedom experienced by African slaves following the end of the Civil War was the rapid growth and expansion of independent black churches,¹⁶⁴ largely Baptist and Methodist. Henry H. Mitchell mentions that one of the factors drawing African-Americans to the Baptist faith was the use of baptism by immersion, which was, to the African slaves, a reminder and reaffirmation of the West African water rituals.¹⁶⁵

Black congregants allowed to worship along with whites were not treated as brothers and sisters, but were instead relegated to separate seating areas within the sanctuary.¹⁶⁶ The sermons which they heard repeatedly enjoined them to be obedient to those having rule over them and to respect their master's authority.¹⁶⁷ It was thus, within the context of life in the antebellum south that African-Americans resisted, in their own way, the European, Westernized brand of Christianity taught to them with its accompanying notions of white superiority, the curse of the black race, and the insistence that, in spite of their conversion experiences, they could not truly be free.¹⁶⁸ In this context, they combined their African cultural traditions with their own perceptions of

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ L. H. Welchel, *The History and Heritage of African-American Churches: A Way Out of No Way* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2011), 125-149.

¹⁶⁵ Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years* (Grand Rapids, MI.: W. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 14.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Christianity to create a unique religious expression that began, as Albert Raboteau describes, as the invisible institution.¹⁶⁹ Though prohibited from meeting apart from the watchful gaze of the taskmaster's eye, African slaves would secretly gather together by arbors, brushes, creeks, or woods to worship the Jesus they understood to "stick closer than a brother," and the One whom they were able to identify with as He was hung on a tree. For African-Americans to form their own religious spaces apart from any type of jurisdictional control by whites was as an act of resistance and protest against the dehumanizing forces of racism, as well as an insistence of being free to worship God.

In the north, due primarily to the ending of slavery at a much earlier time, freed blacks were more disposed to assimilate into the predominant white culture, and aspired to emulate their religious forms of worship, as a key to advancement.¹⁷⁰ Racist attitudes prevailed in the north as much as in the south, and blacks were relegated to certain sections within the churches due to their perceived inferiority as a race.¹⁷¹ Historians note that discontented blacks left the mainline Methodist churches to form their own African Methodist Episcopal churches.¹⁷² However, the liturgy, policies and practices did not differ substantially from their white counterparts.¹⁷³

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois gives some insight into the nature of pastoral leadership and congregational life through a study of the various black protestant denominations in the United States in 1900. The study examined the educational and

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 7.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 9.

experiential qualifications of pastors, the sizes and physical conditions of churches, the educational and economic conditions of congregations, the moral/spiritual character of both pastors and members, the content and quality of sermons preached, the amount of funds raised, whether or not churches were in debt, and the degree to which the church was making an impact on the surrounding community. The study reaffirmed the fact that the black church was historically the center of African-American culture, and the black preacher/pastor was looked upon as the preeminent leader within the black community along religious, political, intellectual and cultural lines.¹⁷⁴

In the South, Baptist ministers tended to pastor only one church in the more urban areas, as opposed to the rural areas where one minister could pastor from two to four churches at a time.¹⁷⁵ It was typical for churches in rural areas to have preaching only once per month.¹⁷⁶ The implication is that rural Southern Baptist churches tended to take care of their members effectively without the aid or guidance of an ever-present pastor, since members in rural areas, for the most part, were laborers and could not afford to hire a minister on a full-time basis.¹⁷⁷ Training for Baptist clergy varied widely, with the majority having little to no education.

A study of twenty-nine Baptist churches in Atlanta found that all of the congregations were operating as democratic bodies where the membership voted on church matters.¹⁷⁸ The deacon board handled all business and financial matters, and

¹⁷⁴ Du Bois, *Negro Church*.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 122.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 73.

pastors remained in power to the extent they were well regarded by the congregation.¹⁷⁹

The content and quality of preaching depended on the education of the pastor and how far removed the congregations were from the more primitive slave congregations of the antebellum South.¹⁸⁰ The study uses the word “primitive” to denote black congregations composed of uneducated clergy and laity, where sermons are primarily focused on damnation and the afterlife and marked by excessive emotionalism.

This theme of a primitive slave congregation is given shape in Du Bois’ highly descriptive and somewhat caricatured portrait of the black preacher/pastor:

The Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil. A leader, a politician, an orator, a “boss,” an intriguer, an idealist, - all these he is, and ever, too, the centre of a group of men, now twenty, now a thousand in number. The combination of a certain adroitness with deep-seated earnestness, of tact consummate ability, gave him his preeminence, and helps him maintain it.¹⁸¹

Now that the black church was at the very center of the African-American community, the black preacher was called upon to excel in a wide variety of roles.

Franklin E. Frazier argues that the Black church became a shelter for African-Americans dealing with a segregated society.¹⁸² Here, we see the shaping of the black pastor’s role, not only as an authority, but also as an authoritarian in terms of leadership style. In Congregational styles of church government indicate that the locus of authority lies ultimately with the members of the congregation who, alone, call their pastor without

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 122-123.

¹⁸¹ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1903), 190-191.

¹⁸² E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America*, Sourcebooks in Negro History (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 4-51.

interference from any ecclesiastical or associational body. Patriarchy being the prime mode of authority and the black pastor serving as the “father figure” for a burgeoning institution that would become an extension of the black family unit led to a more authoritative approach of leadership.¹⁸³

Community Baptist Church’s members were born predominantly in the south, and were reared in the rural areas which involved mainly farming and engaging in sharecropping. Like both my parents, these members grew up on farms where they depended on livestock and the right mixture of sunlight, rain and soil cultivation for sheer survival. Although in retrospect, they were poor, at the time it did not appear so due to the close-knit nature of the communities wherein they resided. Neighbors were more than happy to share canned vegetables, smoked meats, and such with those in need. It can, therefore, be argued that Community reflects the cultural heritage and traditions of rural black Baptist churches in the south which existed during the period of Reconstruction in the United States leading up through the Civil Rights Movement.

Sociologists C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya note that in 1890 approximately ninety percent of the African-American population in the United States resided in the south, and of that ninety, at least eighty percent lived in what is termed the rural south, living as sharecroppers, farmers, and unskilled laborers.¹⁸⁴ One hundred years later, eighty percent of blacks in America were living in urban environments.¹⁸⁵

Community Baptist Church, like a number of black Baptist churches established in

¹⁸³ Corwin E. Smidt, ed., *Religion as Social Capital: Producing the Common Good* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 63.

¹⁸⁴ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 9.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

northern, urban settings, was made up of transplanted southerners, and sought to reflect and continue the rural southern worship polity and religious practices which had become deeply ingrained in them.

Lincoln and Mamiya extensively researched the study of the African-American church by thoroughly examining the seven largest African-American religious bodies in the United States. As part of their research, they studied the life of rural black churches in the south from the late eighteenth century through the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁸⁶ In one of their findings, they noted how often black pastors were absent from their churches, and how the dedicated laity would step in to ensure that programs such as Sunday school and mid-week prayer services would continue.¹⁸⁷ Lincoln and Mamiya examined the sociological factors of the Great Migration of African-Americans to urban cities in the north between the two world wars and its effects on black churches in the south. The paucity of their numbers forced black pastors to minister to more than one church, often traveling hundreds of miles between churches.¹⁸⁸ This, of course led to the increase in pastoral absenteeism among black churches and the rise of laity leadership within these same churches, composed of dedicated members, who would assist in leading the congregation to maintain the life of the church in the absence of pastoral leadership.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, "In the Receding Shadow of the Plantation: A Profile of Rural Clergy and Churches in the Black Belt," *Review of Religious Research* 29, no. 4 (June, 1988): 349-368, *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3511575> (accessed March 22, 2018).

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 352.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 360.

Mamiya and Lincoln suggest that the oft-told tales of strong deacon boards having enormous control over congregational life find their roots in culture of rural churches,¹⁹⁰ of which many African-Americans were participants, many of whom migrated to northern cities in search of the promise of better economic opportunities. Research into the rural south black churches within the “black belt” revealed that a large percentage of these churches were quite accustomed to church life without a pastor in the pulpit every Sunday, offering the congregation consistent leadership and pastoral guidance throughout the week, in addition to making visits to the homes of its members.¹⁹¹ The prevalent practice of pastoral absenteeism allowed for the development and growth of a strong laity to oversee the regular, day-to-day life of the congregation.¹⁹² This meant that the laity was responsible for ensuring that the programs and activities of the church were carried out. Lincoln and Mamiya note that the long-held quarrels and power struggles between pastors and deacon and trustee boards can be traced to these historic formative years in the development of black church congregational polity.¹⁹³

It can be argued that, along with the unique religious style of worship in the rural south, characterized by an emotional intensity in singing, preaching, and praying, parishioners fleeing the Jim Crowism of the south also brought this notion of a strong laity leadership with them, which could conceivably account for the very long history within the black Baptist church of leadership by the deacon board in the absence of a senior pastor. This is evidenced by the fact that in the absence of the leadership of a

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

pastor, the congregations of most black Baptist churches in the Southeast Queens area willingly accepts the chairperson of the deacon board as the person next in charge.

Usually it is the chairperson who will provide for needed leadership during these periods by ensuring the pulpit is supplied with preachers for the Sunday morning services, and that the life of the church continues its day to day functions. Unlike many of the other protestant denominations, the National Baptists do not particularly subscribe to the practice of securing an interim pastor in cases of crisis in the congregation as a result of clergy abuse or financial mismanagement, even in cases where there was a long-tenured pastorate. It is possible that the congregations may have historically utilized the local Baptist associational ordination councils for advisement and guidance according to accepted Baptist policies and practices, and congregational circumstances might have warranted this type of outside intervention. Even in instances where the advisory council has been called, black Baptist congregations remain grounded in the long-standing tenet of local church autonomy, which limits the council's or anyone else's ability to dictate to the congregation.

James Melvin Washington highlighted this unique feature of National Baptists in his description of this body as a "frustrated fellowship."¹⁹⁴ Washington described this ability of black Baptists, who jealously guarded their right to self-governance, to willingly join together with other Baptist congregations to create one of the largest black religious associations in the United States in 1915, in response to the increasing threats of racism, Jim Crow, and segregation.¹⁹⁵ Although a voluntary association, Washington

¹⁹⁴ James Melvin Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986).

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

noted that it did not have the political force to mobilize millions of African-American Baptists to channel this potential political and economic power into promoting tangible gains for blacks in securing economic and political freedom for themselves.¹⁹⁶

For black Baptists, this right to religious autonomy continues to be jealously guarded as the bedrock of Baptist polity and practice. No religious association, whether local, statewide, or national should have the ability to direct, dictate or enforce guidelines for how local congregations should operate.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 3.

CHAPTER 4 DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

PART I: Addressing the Administrative Issues of the Church

The Reverend Dr. Archie Witsell, beloved and esteemed senior pastor of the Community Baptist Church for 50 years, preached his final sermon as pastor on Sunday, January 4, 2015. At the end of that service, as many of the parishioners had grabbed their coats and were having lighthearted conversations with each other, the late assistant to the pastor, the Rev. Dock Johnson, turned towards me in the pulpit as we shook hands and said to me, “Preacher, next Sunday, you will be the pastor-elect of this church.” Rev. Witsell had made his intentions known to the congregation, on more than one occasion, and finally at the most recent business meeting in December 2014, that it was his heart’s desire that I become the next pastor of Community Baptist Church following his official retirement after the first Sunday of the New Year. Many of his immediate and extended family members, who were also members of the church, did not want him to retire; but, Rev. Witsell was adamant in his decision. He made it clear to the congregation that it was neither because of his health nor from a need to retire from preaching, which he loved. Rather, it was from his sincere desire to see the church grow, and he felt that having a younger person leading them would be a critical factor in facilitating this process.

The Tuesday of that week was my first official duty as pastor-elect to preach a sermon on the occasion of the pastoral anniversary of one of Rev. Witsell’s friends in the ministry. It was an awkward moment for me, as I had become accustomed to assisting

Rev. Witsell on this night by accompanying him into the pulpit, getting any water or juice that he needed, and serving as needed: whether he wanted to call on me to read the scriptural passage where his sermon would come from, or offering a word of prayer before the choir sang. I would even assist the choir, if more voices were needed for a particular song. Whatever it was, I was basically there to help him. But now, it felt strange walking into the same church, but with the knowledge that Community was now looking to me to lead as pastor. I was glad to see Community's faces when I walked through the door, but I was even gladder to see my pastor's face along with Rev. Johnson, as they were already upstairs in the study, having a conversation with Rev. Jenkins. I was glad to see my pastor's face because I needed him to be there to help me transition into this new role in which two pastors had shared a close bond for many years.

In retrospect, I wonder how that first night would have gone if Rev. Witsell had not bothered to come? It made me think of a time fifteen years ago, when my pastor asked me preach in his place, so that he could accept a preaching engagement elsewhere. To say the least, I was nervous at the prospect of having to confront one of pastor's good friend's with the news that he would not be there to preach that day, and that he had asked me to do the job for him. Rev. Johnson was present with me that day, and even he wasn't so sure how this pastor would react to the news since nothing had been discussed beforehand. Both he and his wife had this strange look on their faces when we relayed the news, and pastor sat in his chair and began to tell me that he could tell if someone had been called to preach. Eventually I went on to preach that Sunday afternoon. The sermon which I preached, the delivery in which it was given, and the response of the

congregation that day legitimized in the eyes of this pastor a confirmation of my calling by God to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This reflection on the nature of authority within the context of the African-American Baptist congregation became an important factor for me in attempting to understand and make sense of the liminal quality by which this pastoral transition occurred. This undulating current of uncertainty pervaded and affected nearly every area and aspect of the life and fabric of the church. For the first time in Community's history, the congregation would be faced with a new ecclesiastical reality where there was, regrettably, no firm, fixed blueprint, roadmap or manual to read and follow. Instead, our lives together would weave a truly existential production of how a congregation would relate to both a new pastor who wanted to lead and a retired pastor who wished to stay.

At the last church business meeting over which Rev. Witsell presided in December 2014, a question arose from the membership concerning the election of church officers. Normally the various ministries within the church are allowed to select their own officers and to present them as a slate to be voted on by the membership in December. The pastor historically appoints certain key positions within the church such as the chairs of the deacon and trustee boards, the director of Christian education, and the church school superintendent. That night, he made the decision to retain all of the appointed officers in their same positions for the coming year, and then commented that the new pastor, as he settles into his position, will have the latitude to make changes in the appointments as needed.

This decision was not received positively by every member, as there were some who had been vocal in previous meetings that in order for the church to move forward,

the new pastor would need to “move certain people out of the way.” This was a reference to some of the appointed positions. It was also at this meeting that the pastor reiterated his choice in recommending me as the next pastor and called for a vote of the church, adding that he was distinctly aware of the tradition within the Baptist church, that it is the congregation that calls for the pastor, and not one person. He then poignantly reflected on his own appointment by Rev. Sherard fifty years ago, while he lay on his deathbed. Rev. Witsell would often recount hearing Rev. Sherard say that he wanted “this boy to be the next pastor,” and he urged his family members to fulfill his last wish. He was clear that, in spite of how Rev. Sherard felt about him, it was proper that the church membership would be given the opportunity to decide themselves.

To an extent, I felt he was speaking directly to me as well as to the congregation when he added that it wasn’t easy for him when he first began to pastor. He described how there were some who did not agree with the former pastor’s recommendation and considered him only as a supply pastor. However, the vote taken by the membership prevailed in his favor and he was later installed as the third senior pastor of the church.

This meeting would constitute the last official church business meeting over which he would preside, and he utilized this opportunity to reiterate his own personal selection in recommending me as the next pastor, while taking the time to reflect somewhat on his own calling to the ministry and the trials he endured. Rev. Witsell indicated that the journey was not an easy one at the start of his pastorate, and there were members within the congregation who opposed his calling, but others who supported him. He explained that it took time for the relationship to build between himself and the congregation, and he knew he should continue the work Rev. Sherard had begun in

raising funds for the construction of a new edifice to replace the storefront where they had been worshipping. He closed by saying that, with the help of the Lord, the church was able to march proudly into the new sanctuary, and that eventually they were able to pay off the mortgage. He then invited the members present at this meeting to do the same and work with their new pastor, adding that the membership can make their pastor great if they work with him.

The question raised by one of the members had to do, interestingly, with how the church should refer to Rev. Witsell following his retirement. Rev. Johnson rose to explain that Rev. Witsell should be honored always by the church for the many years that he served as the senior pastor, and that the title of “pastor emeritus” should be conferred upon him following his retirement. This was applauded by the members present, with a number giving verbal assent with shouts of “Amen.” Rev. Witsell then called for a standing vote from the membership to approve me as the next pastor. I intentionally did not bother to glance around the room to see who was standing, but instead I kept my eyes on Rev. Witsell while hearing and sensing chairs brushing against the floor and bodies standing to attention. Those closest to me were smiling at me as they stood, while the church clerk took the time to do the count and record the results in the minutes.

I had been advised by my site team members, as well as a few close clergy friends not to make any significant changes in regards to the pastoral appointments, the order of worship, or any of the programs and activities of the church for at least a year. This first year would be one of constant, intentional and purposeful observation. My task was to take a step back and to analyze and critically reflect on all the existing structures and activities of the church. It was important to ensure that Rev. Witsell’s name and new

designation appear regularly in the church bulletin. The pastor's study still bore his name proudly on the outer door while his portrait hung above the doorway to the study.

Although I agreed that very little should change during the first year, Rev. Johnson still believed that some things needed to be changed. He spoke with the deacons and made arrangements with Rev. Witsell to have him park his car in the rear driveway instead of in the front as he normally had done for fifty years. His reasoning was simple: Community had a new pastor and the new pastor should be allowed to park his car right in front of the church. The chairman of the Deacon Board presented me with a set of keys to the pastor's study. Rev. Witsell met with me earlier back in December about the study and relayed to me that he is currently having work done on his basement and that he is making preparations to begin moving his belongings out of the study to his home. I had no intentions to insist or put pressure on him. It was his study for fifty years, and his pictures, awards, citations and other memorabilia graced the walls as a reminder of his enduring identity.

As the designated assistant to Rev. Witsell, Rev. Johnson was given the responsibility of coordinating the preaching schedule for all of the associate ministers for the year. Each minister was given the opportunity to preach on either the second or fifth Sunday, on a rotating basis. Unlike many senior pastors, Rev. Witsell was very liberal in sharing his pulpit with his ministerial staff, all of whom were women with the exception of Rev. Johnson, who served as the assistant to the pastor. However, following his retirement, Rev. Johnson approached me and wanted to know if this was a practice which I intended to continue, and if so, he would not mind continuing to handle this responsibility. I personally valued and appreciated these preaching opportunities and

expressed that we would continue for the ministerial staff. I also considered the need to maintain some continuity for the membership during this transitional period. The familiarity of many of our traditions would serve to ease the minds of a congregation trying to come to terms with accepting Rev. Witsell's retirement and the accompanying uncertainty, loss, anger and frustration it would engender, while accustoming them to an equally familiar face in a very new role as their senior pastor.

By the time I began serving as pastor-elect on Sunday, January 11, 2015, the formal election of church officers had been held and all appointed officers remained in place for the New Year. The church calendar had been completed back in December, and so all of the annual programs and activities of the church would remain unchanged. Between January and April of 2015, there was contention within the joint board regarding whether I should serve as pastor-elect for the duration of a year or less prior to the formal installation ceremony. Some were of the opinion that I needed to "prove" myself as a capable leader while others expressed concern that waiting too long might not serve the church well, in terms of moving forward under a new pastor's leadership. Rev. Johnson advised me to consult the opinions of seasoned pastors within the Eastern Baptist Association, whom I could trust, for guidance in this matter. The consensus was that I had one of two choices to make: either allow this "interim" process to continue for the duration of the year or call a meeting of the joint board to move forward with setting the date for the installation service to occur no later than six months following the start of my tenure as pastor-elect.

I highly respected both men for their leadership ability and wisdom, and I valued their opinions in this matter. However, what influenced me more in deciding to call for a

meeting to set the installation date stemmed from my previous interim pastorate at a small Baptist church in Southeast Queens where I served for approximately 2.5 years before handing in my letter of resignation. It was there that I had elected to serve on an interim basis for one year, during which the church members would have time to consider my leadership abilities and then afterwards vote to elect me as their next pastor. The church did vote after my first year there, but I was then informed by the pastoral search committee that it was felt I needed to grow more in my role as a pastor and the interim period was then extended. Having gone through this experience once taught me the dangers of being placed in such circumstances, where a process could potentially continue indefinitely or until another pastor is secured.

Unlike this previous pastorate, I was readily known by the members of Community because I had grown up in this congregation since the age of 10, and the members would have had the opportunity, on numerous occasions, to assess my spiritual aptitude, leadership potential, and maturity for such a role as senior pastor. For these reasons alone, I was led to agree with the older of the two pastors, who had been serving this congregation for forty years. In speaking with him, they explained that it would be potentially dangerous for the congregation to extend or delay my installation beyond six months because of the enormous leadership vacuum it would create and the accompanying uncertainty it would cause in terms of the direction the church would go.

Around this time, a rumor had been circulating in the church that Rev. Witsell did not willfully resign from office, but rather was forced. A called meeting was then held in early March for the entire congregation, following the close of morning worship that Sunday afternoon, led by the chairperson of the deacon board. The persistent rumor was

discussed and Rev. Witsell was asked to clarify, which he did. A standing vote was requested to set the date for the installation service, and the congregation voted unanimously with the date set for April 17, 2015.

PART II: Addressing the Financial Conditions of the Church

In considering the wide number of issues that needed to be addressed, the most important issue, following my installation in April 2015 the financial condition of the church. For the first time in its 67 year history, Community Baptist Church was facing a financially vulnerable condition. Extensive and costly repairs were needed on all of its existing properties which had already been identified by the governing boards of the church, in addition to the growing expenses in light of a considerably declining congregation. At the start of the demonstration project, Community had roughly 70 to 75 active members, most of whom were 55 years of age and above. A large percentage of this group consisted of retirees who were living on fixed incomes.

By March 2016, Community had to deal with extensive repairs on two houses they owned. Both had been vacated by the previous tenants. In meetings with both the deacon and trustee boards, it was made clear that of the two houses owned by the church, the property across the street from the church could be rented out again. It only needed extensive cleaning, as opposed to the parsonage adjacent to the church that required more structural repairs before it could be used. With a donation from one of the members to rent a small dumpster, I proposed to both boards that we should solicit volunteers to assist with disposing whatever debris remained in the house, and I ventured to discuss this at the scheduled men's ministry meeting.

Our men's ministry was historically created to promote fundraising events by the men for the church. Thus, any of the meetings which were held throughout the year were

done purposefully to organize and implement these activities which consisted of an annual prayer breakfast and an annual men's day celebration. Although fundraising was an important component due to the immediate fiscal needs of the church, it should not have been the sole focus of what men should be discussing or doing if they are gathered together to do ministry in the name of Jesus Christ.

My intent in making my presence known at these meetings was twofold: I wanted to signal to these men that, as their new pastor that I wanted to give my full support to the work that they were doing; but also that I wanted to give direction and guidance to helping the men expand their notion of what men's ministry entails. My goal for this group was to help these men see that their role encompassed much more than just fundraising. As men made in the image and likeness of God, and redeemed by Christ's blood and empowered and regenerated by the Spirit, they were called by God to grow in the knowledge of His will, and assist in building up the local church body through their time, talent and treasure. I wanted these men to know that each of them have much that they can offer each other as well as the congregation, in terms of their wisdom, their natural abilities, and the gifts that God, in Christ, had given them.

In January 2015, when I assumed the office of pastor-elect, I had addressed the men's ministry and suggested that we meet on a monthly basis rather than sporadically, as we had done in the past, particularly around the timing of certain fundraising events. I further suggested that we utilize our time to also plan how we as men could play a significant role in maintaining the church property since we were currently unable to hire a custodian to perform these duties. At the time, the trustees had taken on this role, but it was a job that was not always done consistently due to the fact that there were few

volunteers willing to do the work. I pointed out that the front and back lawn, along with the shrubs, needed to be cut and maintained on a regular basis. I wanted this ministry to serve as a paraministry, with the joint board serving to assist with maintenance projects as needed such as snow and ice removal, cleaning the lights in the sanctuary, and any other tasks that could arise in the course of the year requiring several hands to complete. Although we were not able to encourage 100 per cent participation, we at least could introduce the request to assist in cleaning the church house during these meetings and persuade some of the men, both inside and outside the group, to volunteer.

It was here, in these meetings that I began to explain, biblically and theologically, the role men are to play in building and sustaining the church. Extracting from both the books of Nehemiah and Haggai, I described the plight of Nehemiah in hearing the news of Jerusalem's walls remaining in decay, his immediate reaction to the fact that whatever initial progress to rebuild had come to a grinding halt, and his determination to pray for an opportunity to do something tangible about it. I brought in the prophetic message of Haggai to remind the men that God was not pleased with His people for their lack of concern about repairing the temple, as it represented the presence of God, and that their apathy in disregarding the needed repairs of a sacred space demanded a serious reflection of their attitudes about how the people of God should care for and manage the things of God.

Needless to say, the response I received from these men was lukewarm, although there was consensus that a collective effort on their part to assist with the debris removal was necessary as the church did not have the funds to pay for this. The following Sunday morning, as I had agreed in the meeting, I made a special appeal to the men and to the

women. Afterwards, there were questions from a few of the members as to whether the church would be providing gloves, masks, and cleaning supplies. Since this had already been covered in both the deacon and men's ministry meeting, we were able to assure the congregation that these items would be provided by the trustees to protect everyone's health and safety. The previous tenants had literally destroyed the house. Prior to their departure, they had already refused to pay rent for several months. The church has begun to take steps towards their removal following extensive discussions with them. The police had been called to the home on a few occasions due to complaints from the neighbors living on the block. By the time the tenants had gone, we were left with a house filled with numerous bags of garbage, feces, water-soaked pieces of clothing, a basement filled with water from the water pipes having been severed, and innumerable numbers of flies swarming throughout the inside.

Both the chairpersons of the deacon and trustee boards were instrumental in getting members to volunteer their time to clean the house. Having the dumpster next to the house was helpful as there were several huge items such as the refrigerator, stove, broken tables and chairs, futons, lamp stands, and bags of debris, clothing and feces which had to be removed. Upon opening the windows, the next door neighbor began to complain of flies coming near her home, and we had to explain that the situation was only temporary and for her to be patient while we cleaned. Approximately five to six men from the church were willing to lend their assistance. The inside of the house had a very strong stench and, at times, we had to vacate the house to get some fresh air and return to resume the work. The kitchen was filthy with cold covered food on plates and in pots stacked in the kitchen sink. The refrigerator and stove had to be discarded due to

extensive molding. The tenants left the back yard and patio completely covered with garbage, more clothes and feces. Some of the members began wiping and washing down counters, walls and floors as we removed. It took approximately two weeks before the entire house had been cleared of rubbish and cleaned.

This was only the first step needed towards readying the house to be rented out again. We were then faced with the challenge of repainting the entire house and financing the purchase of both a new refrigerator and stove. Additionally, some of the windows needed replacing as they were either cracked or broken. Due to long-standing non-payment of rent for both properties, the church had experienced the threat of foreclosure on more than one occasion. Added to this were the mounting unpaid property taxes on the church's property. The weekly public offerings which came across the table, along with the tithes and auxiliary fundraising projects were together insufficient to meet the quarterly expenses of the church.

At previous church business meetings, it had been proposed by the trustee board that the central air conditioning unit was in need of repair in the area of \$5000.00. In our joint board meeting, we discussed what steps we could take as a church to raise this amount, and it was agreed that we would ask the membership to make a one-time pledge in the amount of \$100.00 per member. I first asked the joint board members to initiate the pledge giving, but there was reluctance on their part. I reminded them that the joint board consists of the deacons, deaconesses and trustees, and that, together, they comprised the leadership of the church. It was their duty and responsibility to set the example for how the membership were to give and serve, and that it would not seem fair to impose on the membership a request that the leadership themselves were not willing to do.

Some of the participants in this meeting expressed exasperation at the thought of being asked to perform another pledge, and even mentioned that some of the members were just as exasperated. It was even brought to the discussion that the church pews were badly in need of reupholstering, and that members were asking about when this would happen. We agreed that although the pews were an eyesore and embarrassment, particularly when guests were present, but that \$20,000 to reupholster was not a realistic goal at this time, considering the enormous financial debt that the church was already incurring through the increase in property taxes, unpaid mortgage on the church parsonage, the loss of income from the property across the street that had recently been vacated and cleaned, and the existing utility, insurance, payroll, and maintenance costs. The joint board finally came to the consensus that they should lead in the pledge giving, and at least 14 out of the 17 members pledged that evening for the air conditioning unit repair.

I directed the trustees to ensure that the pledge drive be included in the Sunday bulletin and that the posting continue over the next three months during the period of the pledge drive to remind the members. As usual, I made an appeal at the pulpit during Sunday morning services to encourage the membership to give. The pulpit became a medium through which I could address the majority of the membership to encourage the congregation to partner with me in working together to continue the building of God's house.

One of the most difficult issues Community had to face was that not enough income was being generated to adequately meet the expenses of the church each quarter. In spite of the number of fundraising programs which had been planned and executed

over the past year, it was not enough to curtail the growing debt the church had been amassing. Community was blessed to own three separate properties, in addition to its house of worship. Along with the parsonage sitting adjacent to the church on its left side, and the house directly across the street from the parsonage, Community owned a block of unused land adjacent to this house. I prepared myself to address the congregation at their regularly scheduled business meeting in December 2015 with the proposal to sell this unused piece of property for the purpose of paying off the remaining mortgage on the parsonage as well as the already overdue property taxes. The selling off of the church property had been an idea that had floated around the church through previous discussions on resolving the church debt; however, there was a faction within the church that had become staunchly opposed to selling any of the church's property. A portion of this faction were members of the joint board, and had already made their feelings known in previous meetings, the justification being that the membership had invested much in securing these properties and it would not make good business sense to sell anything at this point.

However, there were those who were ready to make significant changes even if it meant selling a portion of the property. To these members, whom I spoke with individually, it didn't make any sense to hold on to property the church was not using in any meaningful way. In their eyes, it made good sense to use the funds from the sale to pay off the enormous debt the church had accumulated to prevent a foreclosure. At the December meeting, I brought up the discussion of the proposal to sell a portion of the church's property, listing the various reasons for taking this action. It generated much discussion among the membership, as both sides argued both for and against the idea. I

was not my intent to have the church put the matter to a vote yet, as the members needed to time to think seriously about the proposal in light of the impending fiscal issues. It was important for me that this be communicated in a public forum, both to promote a degree of transparency within my administration, and to give the membership an opportunity to participate in weighing in and considering all aspects of the issue. I wanted the membership to increase their understanding of the church's financial condition, and take ownership for how this matter would be resolved. I had met with the trustee board prior to the meeting and suggested that they have ready a list of details concerning the sources of indebtedness the church had incurred over the years. The congregation needed factual information to understand the sense of urgency in considering the proposal, as well as the dire consequences if these facts were to be ignored.

Mentioned earlier, the quarterly business meetings at Community were the hub and center of where all the major decisions affecting the church were made both historically and currently, and this history includes a long legacy of meetings that were punctuated at times with intense bickering, and even name calling. In interviewing several members, it was the general consensus that, in addition to the in-fighting, "not much ever got done" at these meetings. It was my intention to reverse this tendency through a number of measures. First, I decided to take a more authoritarian approach to the actual running of the business meeting itself by having a written agenda for myself to keep the meeting organized and purposeful. Secondly, I began each meeting with a selection and exposition of a Scripture text, and usually, this text would center on the themes of unity, the body of Christ, Christian love, and humility. These texts were important in setting a tone for how I expected the meetings to operate. Thirdly, I utilized

my role as the moderator of the meeting to also serve a “referee” in instances where members tried to speak out of turn or attempt to raise their voice, or engage in name calling. Fourthly, I wanted to be both mindful and respectful of people’s time and would encourage and refocus the agenda whenever the discussion moved off topic. Lastly, I made an effort to model for the congregation, through my tone of voice, and choice of words, how members are to relate to one another with civility and respect, even when they may disagree over certain matters. I would confer with Rev. Witsell, and his advice to me was golden. He explained how important it was never to take sides with anyone, and to love the people of God unconditionally.

The church’s lack of adequate funding led to circumstances where the sanctuary, lower fellowship hall, bathrooms, and kitchen were not being kept clean on an ongoing basis. We did not have the resources to hire a custodian to perform the work. I, therefore, proposed to the joint board members that we consider enlisting the help of the various ministries in the church to volunteer their time. In our June business meeting the membership had an opportunity to discuss this issue. Although initially there was lukewarm reception to the whole idea, there were some members who could see the benefit of devising a monthly schedule so that all ministries could equally share the responsibility. It was clarified that the church would supply the cleaning supplies, and that the most convenient time to do the cleaning would be on Saturday afternoons, in preparation for Sunday morning worship service. There was general agreement among the membership that maintaining cleanliness was an important issue needing to be addressed; but members wrestled with the notion of having to volunteer to do it themselves, and a number of members vocalized that it was, in fact, the responsibility of

each member to “clean up after themselves.” It was agreed that a schedule was needed to ensure that there was a degree of equity in assigning the work since a number of the members were part of more than one ministry.

While these issues loomed, the congregation had to grapple with tenants living in both of the church’s properties who had refused to pay their monthly rent. The church had already taken steps to serve notice due to nonpayment. To make matters worse, the church received a notice at the December business meeting from the NYC Department of Buildings listing a series of structural violations that were found within the parsonage following inspection by one of the city officers after receiving an “anonymous” complaint. Between January and March, the trustee board attempted, but was unsuccessful, to gain access to the parsonage to inspect the premises. This was a delicate matter for the church as a whole as the tenant was a relative of one of the members of the church who sat on the Joint Board.

On the one hand, there was a series of negotiations with the tenant’s relatives to convince the tenant to vacate the premises, while plans were begun to address the list of violations from the Department of Buildings. The trustees were required to appear in court to answer the list of charges, and time was given by the church to secure a licensed plumber to examine the illegal gas line that had been connected in the basement, which could potentially cause an explosion. Additionally, the gas meter had been removed from the house without knowledge of the church. As there was a bathroom in the basement and an improperly vented exhaust, these were added to the list of violations. Extensive pictures were taken of the gas line by the DOB, which were shared with the trustees and the utility company was dispatched to shut off the line.

Since the church was able to prove that the house was sold to them with the existing bathroom, the violation was removed; however, the church was still responsible for the illegal gas line and improper vent exhaust. Securing a licensed plumber would cost the church in excess of \$4000.00 to make the necessary repairs and remove the violations from the city record.

Having presented the proposal at the December meeting in 2015, I verbally expressed my thanks to the entire membership for participating in the discussion, and asked that they think about it as I wanted to bring this to a vote in the March meeting in 2016. I wasn't particularly worried about the "grapevine" within the congregation, since everything had been made public and placed on record, and there were too many members present for any messages to get distorted. We reconvened in March of the following year and presented the church with copies of pictures of the violations the church had received earlier. I had the trustees pass out the pictures while I explained that, in addition to the nonpayment on the church properties and the overdue property taxes owed, we were now facing having to resolve a series of building violations. When the proposal was put to a vote, the majority of the membership supported the sale of the parcel of land. By the end of July of that same year, the New York State Attorney General had approved the sale of the parcel and by August the remaining mortgage and property taxes had been paid off. An enormous financial burden had been lifted, and the congregation could now focus on additional needed repairs to its existing properties. The violations on the parsonage were resolved, with the gas line correctly refitted and the exhaust vent fixed.

While we were addressing these issues, the church had to simultaneously handle the financing for preparing the house across the street to be rented out. One of the trustees volunteered to use his credit card to purchase a new stove and refrigerator, and volunteers were secured to do the painting. At one of the regularly scheduled trustee board meetings, the chairperson was adamant in proposing that the congregation should have the final say in selecting the tenant to occupy the house, due to the numerous issues they had with the previous tenants. It was expressed by a few board members that it appeared they were being unfairly targeted by the church as responsible for allowing the previous tenants to move into the house. One of the trustees then brought up the fact that they had someone who was willing to move into house, and this sparked a discussion about the apparent conflict of interest involved as the prospective tenant was a close friend and former co-worker of one of the trustees.

I vocalized the need for the trustee board to develop a fair and impartial vetting process, to include the submission of a formal application, and a need to submit to a background check. In addition, the housing opportunity would need to be advertised in the church bulletin for a specific period of time to give the congregation time to respond. One of the board members had been in discussion with a member of the church who worked as a licensed real estate agent, and we agreed that she had the expertise to offer suggestions on specific questions that should be included in the application to ensure that prospective tenants are properly and thoroughly vetted. There were members on the trustee board and in the congregation who preferred not to go through a lengthy process and were quite willing to rent the house to this person outright. The church desperately needed the funds, and it did not make sense to prolong the process.

This was the first time our church developed an application process, as it was apparent now that we had a lengthy history of unscrupulous tenants who took advantage of the church. Over time, they refused to pay rent, and then proceeded to inflict damage on the church property, leaving the church with the extensive repairs needed to make the dwelling livable. This cycle had been repeated with every tenant the church rented to over its twenty-year history in its capacity as the landlord. It was for these reasons that the majority of the trustee board members were willing to move forward with instituting the new process. They were members who were more concerned with the fact that the church has sustained losses over the years as a result of renting properties to families without taking the time to do the necessary background checks. Additionally, the trustees would historically call the family in to interview them, but they did not always have skill level needed to focus the interview in a way to “weed out” unqualified applicants.

Finally, they did not want to bear this responsibility alone, and insisted that the final decision should be made by the congregation. In meeting with the trustee board separately, we had to come to an agreement on what the process would look like, and it was discussed whether the property should be rented to a member of the church. Because one of the former tenants was related to one of the members of the church, and had willfully withheld monthly rent owed to the church, the idea of renting to a member of the church was met with disapproval by most of the membership at the June business meeting. The process was presented to the church membership as a recommendation by the joint board at that meeting. The trustees would still interview each applicant, but they benefitted from having an application to review to determine financial viability, along

with the results of background checks and references provided, before making a recommendation to the church at the September meeting.

This was agreed to by the church, and by the time of the September meeting, there were only two possible candidates for the church to choose from, since their applications were complete and the background checks were done. There were more applicants who had applied but were not recommended as their applications were missing information which they had promised but did not supply. I recommended that voting be done by casting ballots. The church membership had listened as one of the trustees summarized the results of the application process for each of the two prospective tenants, and following all the questions that were raised, proceeded to vote, and a majority selected one of the two.

Thus, by December 2016, at the last business meeting of the year, the church had successfully sold a parcel of its property and paid off both the property taxes and the remaining mortgage on one of the properties. The previous tenant who refused to pay rent vacated the house, and the church was able to address and correct all of the violations received by the Department of Buildings. The vacated house across from the church was cleaned, painted, and new appliances purchased to prepare for the new tenant. Finally, the church was able to institute a new application process on vetting prospective applicants and the church selected the new tenant based on more thorough information given by the trustees. The tenant was able to move into the home by December.

We were then able to address the need for a part-time custodian, and it was approved for the church to advertise for the position. In separate trustee meetings, we had to discuss the specific responsibilities for this position, the number of days the person

would be needed and the total number of hours per week. It was important for us to know that ministries were actually meeting as stated on the church calendar, and separate meetings were held to obtain this information. The trustees then had to decide on the specific tasks which the custodian would do, and it was decided that the priorities were the bathrooms, vacuuming the sanctuary and conference room areas, and sweeping and moping the floor in the fellowship hall, along with removal of the garbage, as needed. Once the trustees could settle on the number of days and hours, they then had to agree to the pay rate commensurate with those duties and in keeping with the prevailing rates in many of neighboring churches which we fellowshipped with. Having done this, we were able to place an advertisement in the church bulletin with the pertinent details and give a time period for applications to be submitted.

Rev. Johnson had faithfully served as the Assistant to the Pastor for many years, and had been given a number of responsibilities. Among them was the task of coordinating the planning for the annual fall revival in late September. I met with one of the deaconesses who had worked closely with Rev. Johnson for a number of years planning the revivals, and she gave me the phone number of the guest preacher from the previous year, to which I reached out in order to extend the invitation for this year. The question was asked whether I should invite the same preacher, and my response was that we should, as this would have been Rev. Johnson's wish.

There had been some grumbling last year about the revival lasting five days, and I was informed that Rev. Johnson had paid for the guest preacher from his own pocket since the church was not in the financial condition to do so. I recommended that we reduce the number of days to three, and informed the deacon and trustee board chairs.

Neither one had issues with this nor did the joint board, for in fact very few members participated in the revivals from preceding years, and members, overall, were not very enthusiastic about the thought of coming out each night over the period of a week for services.

PART III: Addressing the Pastoral Transition

By December 2015, I had entered my eighth month of service as pastor since the formal installation service on April 17, 2015. Having had the opportunity to observe, I was now prepared to begin implementing several changes.

In discussions with the site team, it was suggested that I utilize my position as pastor to find meaningful ways to publically celebrate Rev. Witsell's accomplishments during his fifty-year tenure. Rev. Witsell continued to attend Community Baptist Church regularly following his retirement, and would even attend most, if not all, anniversary programs, concerts, special banquets and prayer breakfasts. Although he never admitted it, there was the possibility that he was also trying to adjust to his new role as the pastor emeritus, having wrapped his identity in the pastorate for fifty years. It may have been difficult for him to accept this new reality. I wanted to find ways to continue to include him in the fabric of the church, and so I would repeatedly, near the end of each anniversary program or special event, give room in the order of the program for Rev. Witsell to give remarks.

As in most black Baptist churches, it is customary for a special program in the church to close with a few remarks from the senior pastor prior to the benediction given. Usually, this brief period provides an opportunity for the under shepherd to acknowledge and thank certain members for coordinating the event, as well as to comment on and congratulate the sponsoring auxiliary for their hard work and dedication. From a political

aspect, it allows the leader to affirm the importance of the work that is being done in the name of Jesus Christ, and it also affirms for the particular members their own value and worth, not only in the eyes of the congregation, but in the eyes of their pastor. When called on to give remarks, I would immediately acknowledge the presence of Rev. Witsell, and then invite him to the pulpit or podium to speak, adding something very meaningful about Rev. Witsell's relationship with the auxiliary, and then asking the congregation either to stand or clap their hands while he made his way to the front.

If the program included a guest preacher whom Rev. Witsell had known throughout the years, I would make it a habit to alter the program and invite Rev. Witsell to make the introductions instead. Now why would I do this? There were a number of factors that I was concerned about. First, our congregation was not in the financial position to fund a series of events within the church to say goodbye to Rev. Witsell. The church had already given Rev. Witsell a lavish retirement banquet, as well as two birthday parties in the lower fellowship hall of the church. We had to stay focused fiscally in order to meet our monthly expenses. However, I needed to recognize that the church still was mourning the "loss" of their pastor whom they loved. In what ways, then, could I help the church gradually deal with this loss? For one thing, Rev. Witsell would, at some point, remind the congregation in his remarks that he has retired, and that they are to follow their new pastor. He would say many other things, and even tell a joke or two, and have the members laughing hysterically.

What I discovered as I allowed him this space was that he would take the time to reflect on the historical significance of whichever auxiliary he was addressing, as it related to the overall development of the church. In doing so, he would highlight one or

two deceased members who were influential in contributing to the purpose and direction of the ministry. These members were somewhat known to some within the congregation while others could vividly recall others with smiles, upward waves of their hands and warmhearted “amens.” These moments of reflection were well received by the congregation, and usually there would be complete silence while everyone would focus their attention on Rev. Witsell. Each time he was given opportunity to make remarks, he would, essentially, tell the members stories about the congregation’s beginning, and how it grew over time. Each time of reflection became a time for the pastor emeritus and congregation to engage in a review of the past and the present. If there were guest preachers present who knew Rev. Witsell, I would ask that Rev. Witsell make the introduction in my place. Usually the auxiliaries would have me to fulfill this role, but I would make this adjustment while in the pulpit and then proceed to emphasize the extent of his relationship with the guest preacher over the period of fifty years. I would either briefly recount the fellowship both pastors had and the fact that the current fellowship between both churches stems directly from the bond these two pastors shared, and that I am a recipient as well as the congregation.

Second, I wanted to include Rev. Witsell in the Sunday morning worship, so I suggested he lead the congregation in prayer on the first Sunday, since we observed the Lord’s Supper on that Sunday, and to also assist me with distributing the elements to the deacons, deaconesses and ministerial staff. If we had afternoon or weeknight services where guest preachers were invited, I would make it a habit to ask Rev. Witsell to lead the prayer with the guest preacher in the study prior to going to the pulpit.

Of the many qualities Rev. Witsell possessed, it was his love for the ministry of prayer that endeared him to the congregation. Rev. Witsell was known throughout the local Baptist association to be a man of prayer. Growing up in Community, I would often hear the older members refer to Rev. Witsell as a “praying preacher.” Rev. Witsell would recount the years he grew up in the rural area of South Carolina, and how his father would make the family get up early on Sunday morning and would lead them into the woods to say their morning prayers. Prayer meant something to Rev. Witsell that was uniquely special and different in its own right. He would often emphasize the need to pray in almost every sermon, and rarely would he ever miss a Wednesday night prayer meeting.

The altar prayer is one of the high points in our Sunday morning service where the pastor would call the members to stand (if they were able) and to make their way towards the altar which is situated squarely at the head of the center aisle and stands buttressed against the lower part of the pulpit. Just as the pulpit is centered, the altar is as well, with the Bible opened and resting against a metal base with two candles, unlit, but standing on either side of the Bible. At Community, the members would allow the children to stand closer to the altar while the adults would stand around them, with everyone joining hands. I would then call on Rev. Witsell to come and lead the congregation in prayer. In this moment, we would pray for our nation, our political leaders, our community, families, our youth, and if there were any recent illnesses, hospitalizations, or deaths, we would include these affected families as well. If you were to ask an adult member of the congregation about Rev. Witsell’s prayers, you would get an immediate response that he prays fervently and sincerely. Rev. Witsell would usually

begin his public prayers with a quote from a well-known hymn, and this is an example of how he would begin:

Must Jesus bear the cross alone, and all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for everyone, and there's a cross for me;
The consecrated cross I'll bear 'til death shall set me free,
And then go home my crown to wear, for there's a crown for me.

Most Holy and Everlasting Father, Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, It is again that we come in Your Name to say, 'thank you,'

The first Sunday of each month, we observed the Lord's Supper right after the morning sermon has been delivered and the call to discipleship made. There is no real break in the service other than the fact that the transition is publically announced from the pulpit while the ushers hand out copies of the Baptist Church covenant to be read at the beginning of the Lord's Supper. I invited Rev. Witsell to join me at the communion table to assist me in distributing the elements. The deacons and deaconesses would distribute to the congregation, but Rev. Witsell and I would then distribute to the deacons, deaconesses, and ministerial staff.

Third, in situations where I could not be there, I would ask Rev. Witsell take the lead in conducting the Bible study during our Wednesday night prayer service. Rev. Witsell rarely missed prayer service and became, for me, a model of how a minister should take the time to study and research the scriptures. There were other members that I could have chosen for this task, but I felt it was important, for the continuity and stability of the church, to include Rev. Witsell in some of the pastoral roles within the church to send a clear message to the church that he continues to be valued, respected, appreciated and loved for his many years of service to both the congregation and community at large.

In most cases, the preceding pastor has transitioned, has become disabled due to a debilitating illness or has moved away from the neighborhood entirely. In such cases, the

physical presence of the pastor becomes absent, and this can have an emotional and psychological effect on the congregation dealing with this “loss.” However, when the pastor has retired and elects to remain as a member of the congregation, the question arises as to the retired pastor’s new identity. How should the congregation relate to him, as well as to the new pastor, particularly when one has served in a role for fifty years.

PART IV: Addressing the Ministries of the Church

In December 2015, I presented my proposal to the membership at our regularly scheduled quarterly business meeting to create a Leadership Council consisting of the presidents or chairs of each of the auxiliaries. It was an ambitious project, as there were presently twenty-six auxiliaries participating: deacon board, deaconess board, trustee board, missionary circle, pastor’s aide, joint usher board, nurses unit, willing workers, youth ministry, Sunday school, Christian education board, men’s ministry, women’s ministry, liturgical dance ministry, senior choir, gospel chorus, voices of truth, male chorus, junior and children’s choirs, and the various state clubs.

The primary purpose of the meetings was for Christian leadership formation. The plan was that we would meet for one hour per month on the third Monday. I arranged for the church clerk to be present in order to keep an accurate record of our meetings, the topics that were discussed and any follow-up that was needed. I would prepare an agenda beforehand to maintain a focused discussion and not get sidetracked with tangential issues. Throughout the nine months of meetings, we would discuss leadership issues such as modeling Christ-like conduct, improving efficiency in running auxiliary meetings, understanding and reflecting on the implications of Matthew 28:18-20, as it relates to conducting outreach ministry and evangelistic activities.

I would encourage the group to find creative ways of keeping up with the members within their auxiliary who were out for extended periods, and to keep me informed. I would encourage members of the group who had not participated to consider tithing, and would explain biblically and from personal experiences the spiritual benefits of such an exercise. The meetings would begin with a brief devotion, and then I would take five minutes to expound upon the scriptures. I would frequently bring up the need for more unity and love in the body, and would encourage the participants to model Christ as the ideal who exemplified sacrifice and service, in the spirit of humility and love. The meetings also afforded the members the opportunity to share collective concerns that they otherwise would not have been able to bring up at the business meetings.

In dealing with the pastoral transition, I utilized the meetings to remind the leaders that it was important that I review any correspondence before it was mailed out. I was not sure how they worked this out with Rev. Witsell, but I wanted to be clear with them of my expectations, especially since I had seen a number of typographical and spelling errors as an associate minister and I did not want any correspondence going out unless it was first reviewed by me. In some ways, I anticipated some resistance from the group, but instead I was met with a very long silence. Finally, one of the group members asked me when it would be possible for them to meet with me as they had an upcoming anniversary, and I simply told them to see me right after morning service.

Surprisingly, the meetings became a vehicle for leaders to verbally express their own thoughts about how the church was operating and what changes they felt were needed. Many of the choir presidents expressed concern to me about how loud the

musician played the organ on Sundays, almost drowning out the singing. They informed me that other members were not able to hear the words of the songs, and also that the current sound system in the church needed improvement. At another meeting, some of the presidents expressed concern over the existing practice of doing a roll call of the auxiliaries at each anniversary celebration, and that it was financially taxing on them since many of them wore “several hats” and were already paying auxiliary assessments as well. There appeared to be a consensus among the leaders in the group that this practice should stop, and the suggestion was carried though at our next quarterly business meeting where the proposal to disband the roll call was made and approved by the church body.

At one point, some of the leaders within the group expressed their frustration with the number of fundraising events that were scheduled throughout the year, and suggested consolidating their fundraising efforts to reduce the number of overall events. Some of the members were critical of the numerous times they were being asked to purchase a ticket for an event, in addition to having to tithe and pay offerings and assessments. After listening to the group, I suggested that they consider consolidating their fundraising efforts by working with another auxiliary. This suggestion was, again, met with silence, and then one of the leaders remarked that it might be a challenge working with another auxiliary if both are not willing to equally share the work of fundraising. I then responded by saying that the auxiliaries need to think of more effective ways they can fundraise, and that they should consider consolidating their efforts. This led to a discussion about anniversary celebrations, and I continued that the auxiliaries should consider combining their anniversary days as well. I used the annual Men and Women’s day events as one

example, and the various choir anniversaries as another. There was some immediate positive feedback when this was mentioned.

One of the issues brought to my attention was that some of the auxiliaries were not meeting regularly to conduct business. During our monthly leadership council meetings, I would repeatedly bring up the importance of each auxiliary having regularly scheduled business meetings, not just to select officers for the next year, but also to adequately plan and execute any programs and activities. At the meetings, I would request that minutes be taken and even provided a sample for each ministry leader on how to record whatever decisions were made collectively.

When the quarterly business meetings were held, I would discuss the results of the meetings with the leadership council, since the attendance at these meetings was not that great. The leadership council provided a conduit for two-way communication to occur between myself and the ministry leaders to increase transparency and to keep ministry leaders informed of any changes or new initiatives. For example, when I decided to convene a committee to review the existing bylaws, I would encourage the ministry leaders to select one person from their ministry to represent the ministry at this particular meeting and to be responsible to report back to the ministry leader and group on what was discussed.

PART V: Preaching Series on Leadership

Beginning in January 2016, I implemented a preaching series on Leadership through an examination of Jesus' ministry style from the perspective of Matthew's Gospel. A total of ten sermons were delivered between January 17, 2016 and May 2016:

1. Matthew 4:1-11 – How to Deal with Temptation
 - a. The importance of being led by the Spirit

- b. The importance of studying God's Word
 - c. The importance of exercising one's faith
- 2. Matthew 5:1-12 – Cultivating the Right Attitudes for Leadership
 - a. Developing an attitude of humility
 - b. Developing an attitude of thirsting for godliness
 - c. Developing an attitude of patience during trials
- 3. Matthew 5:13-16 – Being a Person of Influence
 - a. Think about what you Say
 - b. Think about what you Do
 - c. Think about how you Think
- 4. Matthew 6:25-34 – Trusting God in Anxious Times
 - a. God takes care of His Creation
 - b. God will take care of You
 - c. Learn how to trust Him
- 5. Matthew 7:7-11 – Developing a Consistent Prayer Life
 - a. Scheduling consistent times to Pray
 - b. Know what to Pray for
 - c. Trusting that God hears your Prayers
- 6. Matthew 7:21-27 – Making Christ the Center of One's Life
 - a. Paying Attention to the Word
 - b. Taking Steps to Follow the Word
 - c. Witnessing to the Durability of the Word
- 7. Matthew 8:18-22 – Counting the Costs of Discipleship
 - a. Ministry was never meant to be comfortable
 - b. Ministry was never meant to be convenient

- c. Ministry was never meant to be an option
- 8. Matthew 11:25-30 – The Invitation to Rest
 - a. Jesus wants to partner with You
 - b. To Partner with Jesus, you must follow Him
 - c. When you Follow Him, you will find Rest
- 9. Matthew 13:1-23 – Growing in Grace
 - a. Growth Takes Time
 - b. Trials will Come
 - c. Watch out for Weeds
- 10. Matthew 14:15-21 – Christ is the Source of our Provision
 - a. Stop Looking at Your Limitations
 - b. Work with What You Have
 - c. The Lord Will Provide

CHAPTER 5 EVALUATION

Thirty percent of the 75 members of Community Baptist Church members were selected to take the survey. They provided their age range, the number of years they were a member of Community, and the number of years they were a member under the new pastor. They were also asked whether they were a leader within the church, a member only with no auxiliary affiliation, or a member of an auxiliary. If they were part of a ministry, they were asked to provide that information as well. The age brackets were Youth under 12; Youth under 18; 18-25; 25-50; 50-65; and over 65.

Surveys were handed out to pre-selected members to cover as wide a range of the membership as possible. This included older members, newer members, members who were either part of a ministry, leaders within the congregation, teenagers, millennials, and children. Surveys were distributed to members individually, at the end of Sunday morning service, where there was no scheduled afternoon service, so that members would have time to think about their responses as they completed the surveys. A total of twenty-two surveys were completed and returned.

Participants were asked a series of questions related to the new pastor's leadership, specifically whether he has defined where he is leading the church, and whether he is leading by example, and through his teaching and preaching. The survey also asked if respondents were beginning to understand where the pastor is leading the church. Additionally, questions were posed as to whether respondents observed any

changes/improvements/growth, and if they themselves had changed in any way. The survey asked for feedback on what additional details should be included in the pastor's vision for the church, and an additional comments section was included at the end.

The results of the survey indicate that a high majority of those surveyed believe that the new pastor leads by example, as well as through his preaching and teaching. Regardless of age differences, most respondents are beginning to understand where the new pastor is leading the church, and the majority mentioned the importance of studying God's word and growing in the Lord. Most of the respondents indicated that they see positive changes in the church, and that they have also changed. There was no difference in response between respondents who were long-time members under the previous pastorate or more recent members. The largest groupings were those between the ages of 50-65 and over 65. Regardless of age grouping, respondents wrote their suggestions on what should be included in the pastor's vision.

In addition, selected observations were made of the responses to include the pastor emeritus in the worship services so as to define a new role for him and to honor his accomplishments as a shepherd over God's flock. The congregation appears particularly pleased that Rev. Witsell has opportunities to pray publically during our worship, and has preached for our church anniversary and men's day celebrations. When called upon to give remarks, there is a sense that the congregation needs to see him in this role. He is frequently and proudly referred to as the pastor emeritus both within the congregation and among our Baptist associational fellowships. He continues to be esteemed and the congregation enjoys his sense of humor.

It appears that the implementation strategies were somewhat successful in helping the congregation to adjust through the pastoral transition. There appears to be more of an acceptance of my role as the pastor, and there is feedback that what I have been preaching, teaching and modeling within and outside the walls of Community Baptist Church is beginning to have a positive effect. The church is beginning to see my vision and has also recognized changes within the congregation for the better. What is most important to me is that the congregation has begun to see a change in themselves.

There is tremendous work still to be accomplished. More training is needed for both leaders and laypersons. More pastoral care work is needed. It can be debated whether a retired pastor should stay or leave their congregation. The research indicates that they should relocate, but retired pastors who stay are quite beneficial to new pastors like me, when they continuously encourage the congregation to support, love and work with their new pastor.

CHAPTER 6

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

Pastor/Shepherd

Having grown up in Community Baptist Church, I was keenly aware of the church's legacy of offering hospitality to first-time visitors participating in our worship services. However, in speaking with my site team, there appeared to be a need to strategize and plan for more intentional ways Community could engage and minister to this particular group. As I thought about the Ministerial Staff, the Sunday School and the Men's Ministry, I reflected on the biblical text in Matthew 25:31-46 where Jesus instructs his disciples to extend their field of vision beyond themselves and those they love to consider the sacredness of the role of ministering to those who are in need. This begins with reflection and prayer for discernment of existing needs. In my role as pastor, I have come to value the disciplines of listening and observation. Spending time having conversations with members, whether individually or in groups was beneficial in getting a sense of what was important to the congregation.

In conjunction with my site team, we realized that Community exercised considerable hospitality in welcoming visitors and publically acknowledging their presence; however, what was needed was a way to follow up with these visitors by letting them know we appreciated their coming, and inviting them to some of our upcoming ministry events. It was clear that we needed to utilize 21st century technology to increase efficiency and reduce costs due to postage. It was, therefore, decided that we would plan

on developing a welcoming packet for visitors which provided them a brief listing of our services and would allow them to complete a form so that we could create a database to send out thank you notes by email with additional follow up over a six-month period, inviting them to upcoming events. I presented the proposal in several meeting formats: during the morning worship service as part of my pastoral announcements, during our quarterly business meetings, and during the monthly leadership council meetings. Following discussion with the site team, it was decided that the ushers would take the initiative to work on this project.

The Ministerial Staff, Sunday school department and Men's ministry were identified. There was a pronounced need from the associate ministers to arrange monthly meetings for them. These were five women, ranging in age from 30 to 75, who had all been licensed under Rev. Witsell. I had met with them briefly to inform them of my intent to hold regular meetings with them on a monthly basis for training purposes. Once we were able to agree on a particular day and time, we began meeting on the same day as the Leadership Council but an hour later. The purpose of the meetings was sermon preparation, pulpit etiquette, and assistance of the deacons with the distribution of the Lord's Supper to the sick and shut-in. As I had mentioned previously, we only had three active deacons, and at least 12 to 15 sick members who needed to be communed each month. I utilized the bulk of the meetings to go over some preliminary information to prepare them for the visits. This included respecting the homes and the member's privacy when visiting, remembering to keep the visit brief due to the member's illness, and not to use the visit for prolonged casual conversation, but rather to be intentional in administering the Lord's Supper. I gave the staff an outline of what to do, and

encouraged them to be prepared to read scripture and have prayer. I suggested they ask the sick member if there was a favorite hymn they wanted to sing. I went over that they should briefly expound on the institution of the Lord's Supper from the scripture, and afterwards, to close the visit with prayer for the member as well as for anyone else there in the home.

In speaking with the superintendent and the director of Christian education, there seemed a need to provide ongoing training to the teaching staff to enhance their skills and improve their teaching techniques. Many were long-standing members of the church who had been teaching for several years. The Men's ministry had recently lost a few significant members and was in need of revitalization.

To support and nurture the existing staff, *Effective Teaching Practices for the 21st Century*¹⁹⁷ was selected as the text. Published by the Sunday School Publishing Board, it was a recognized tool for Christian educators. In meeting with the superintendent and the Christian education director, weekly trainings were planned for one hour on Wednesday evenings, right before the start of prayer service, as an incentive to encourage the teachers to engage in prayer and the study of the Word as spiritual discipline practices. The text was used in conjunction with the Sunday school literature already in use (Urban Ministries), and the topics covered in the weekly training emphasized the need for the teaching staff to know their students' learning styles and adapt their teaching techniques to facilitate more effective and relevant teaching. This meant that the teachers needed to expand their own understanding of how lessons were to be presented and to challenge and resist the notion that the lecture method was not always the most effective method to

¹⁹⁷ Mary E. McConnell, *Effective Teaching Practices for 21st Century Christian Educators*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, NJ: Townsend Press, 2009)

use. Teachers were introduced to a variety of learning methods including tactile, visual, and kinesthetic, and the trainings allowed for demonstrations as well as practice sessions by the staff. A total of nine teachers were on staff at the time of this training. Teachers were encouraged to purchase their own books.

The Men's ministry consisted of a group of five to six men, most of whom were the deacons and trustees of the church. Similar to the Sunday school staff, these men had been members for more than twenty years. It was determined that the training would be conducted informally during the beginning of the meetings, which occurred on a monthly basis. The intended purpose of the training was to rekindle and motivate the men to see their role in caring for the church property and to ultimately begin to take ownership of their church in terms of ensuring the property was maintained. The biblical texts of Nehemiah surveying the damaged wall of Jerusalem and the prophetic outcries of Haggai against the neglected house of the Lord were utilized in bringing attention to the responsibility of the congregation to demonstrate care and concern for the things of God, since the members were in fellowship with God. The training emphasized their spiritual calling as leaders in God's house to set the example for the rest of the congregation. Thus, the training focused on the cultivation of servant-leadership traits of humility, mutual respect, service, and obedience to Christ.

In both instances, there was growth in the ministries. For the Sunday school staff, there was an increased awareness of their own primary teaching styles and a beginning awareness of the need to modify their approach depending on the learning style of the students. The Men's ministry experienced an increased awareness of their role as evidenced by their willingness to assist with mowing the lawn, sweeping and cleaning

around the perimeter of the church, and offering to help during snow storms. At the time, the church did not have the ability to hire a custodian, and the men were instrumental in helping out.

As a pastor, one of the insights I learned was that nurturing involves patiently giving others the tools they need to be more effective and to inspire more confidence in their own abilities. Nurturing also requires a certain amount of time spent working with others as ministry is being conducted. In many ways, I have learned from the members I worked closely with and they have gotten to know their pastor in ways they would not have, had we not partnered in ministry. Nurture also involves allowing for some degree of ambiguity and letting others discover for themselves, in serendipitous ways, the work God does through and in us.

Leader

One of the issues that had been brought to my attention early on in my pastorate was the fact that not all the ministries were meeting on a regular basis to conduct business meetings. It was then assumed that the ministries would function more efficiently if they were meeting more frequently. They could plan, communicate more effectively and become more goal-oriented. With this in mind, I included in my agenda with the leadership council my thoughts and feelings about the need for all the ministries within the church to strive to meet regularly and to get into the habit of recording their minutes. Not only was I asking that each ministry share copies of their minutes with me, I stressed that it was important that ministries become more evangelistic and outreach focused. I explained that ministries were to follow up with members who were not coming to church regularly, and to contact them, send cards, visit them at home, etc. I emphasized that the church is a family and each member is important to God and to one another.

Additionally, each ministry was to think carefully and thoughtfully about developing an outreach ministry.

To this end, a template of a meeting agenda was devised, and at the next scheduled meeting, this template was shared with the group, with each leader receiving a copy. I then took the time to review each section of the template. The few minutes that I received and the discussions I had with a sample of the leadership revealed a number of issues. First, there was clearly a learning curve involved. At the time the template was explained, I had falsely assumed that by simply going through the form that this method would be sufficient. Secondly, I had not realized that, depending on the makeup of the ministry, those elected to serve in a secretarial capacity may not have possessed the ability to complete this task themselves. Thirdly, there was a possible trust issue and it was not clear what I should do with the minutes. This was good to know because of the potential barriers that can arise when new directions for ministry are cast. When these barriers exert themselves, they need to be addressed head-on and resolved. However, some of the ministries were taking the initiative and reaching out to members who were not in church, and this was evidence that leaders were beginning to align with my vision. I am keenly aware that there was still a trust factor that permeated this process. As a new pastor, I must realize the limits of my authority, which amounts to the extent to which I have earned the congregation's trust.

Rendle speaks of the goal of leadership as producing change, and the responsibility of management to promote and provide a sense of stability. Leaders should not think that they are required to come up with all the right answers or think of all the right solutions. The job of leaders is to listen intentionally to the congregation and to be

able to discern what the needs are so that, through this process, leaders can experiment with new ways and models of doing ministry to help congregations cope with and deal with the pervasive changes that are taking place, not only within congregations, but also the larger society. What worked before will not work now. What one congregation may be using may not quite fit another congregation.¹⁹⁸

Cole invites leaders to consider the powerful effect of appealing to internal motivations as a method of nurturing and developing disciples. Cole analyzes Paul's communications with Timothy in the pastoral letters to reveal how much Paul wanted to appeal to Timothy's desire to please God, to do the best that he could do, and that he would benefit from all this hard work.¹⁹⁹

A workshop on the basics of evangelism was provided as a resource to the leadership council and the entire congregation, as this was part of my vision for Community. Two more workshops were then scheduled which provided a more hands-on training where participants engaged in mock sessions before going out into the community to witness.

Spiritual Leader

As I engaged in a biblical reflection on leadership in general, I was particularly drawn to Paul's relationship with young Timothy, as it reminded me of my relationship with Rev. Witsell. I grew up in Community Baptist Church under Rev. Witsell's leadership. He baptized me, married me, ordained me as deacon, licensed me as a

¹⁹⁸ Gilbert R. Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1998), Chapter 1, "Getting There from Here: Leadership and Change."

¹⁹⁹ Neil Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God: Multiplying Disciples Through Life Transformation Groups* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2014), 29-33.

minister, prepared me for the ordination council, and most recently, he laid his hands upon me during the service of installation, after having selected me to succeed him as the fourth pastor of Community Baptist Church. By all accounts, he is my spiritual father in the ministry. So as I reflected on the Pauline texts, I immediately thought of the immense wisdom and pastoral experience Rev. Witsell possessed, which he was willing to share through his preaching and teaching, but also in the informal conversations we would have. I say all this because the transition experience has not been an easy one. It was not easy for Timothy either. We have the Apostle's words of encouragement: "Don't let anyone despise you because of your young age. Instead, be an example to the believers in word and in deed." Paul had seen something in Timothy when they met in Iconium that perhaps Timothy did not see in himself – a readiness to do missionary work. Pastoral transitions are challenging, and, at times, you do not feel equipped or qualified to lead God's people. It was extremely helpful to reach out to a seasoned pastor of another church who became a mentor to me and listen to my concerns and anxieties.

The experience at the Hampton Minister's conference was a blessing in that it served as a spiritual retreat for my wife and me. For one week, I was ministered to by a variety of prominent lecturers and preachers. That week confirmed for me that the Lord had me in the right place and to remain steadfast, loving God's people, being patient with them during this season and continuing to preach and teach God's word.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Proposal
Plan of Implementation

Goal 1: Raise awareness of the servant-leadership style of Jesus as a model for leading others

Strategy 1: Develop a preaching series which centers on the ministerial actions of Jesus to highlight models of biblically-based service.

Strategy 2: Locate specific biblical texts within a selected Gospel which focus on equipping believers with leadership skills, and creating three-point outlines to reinforce the message for each text.

Strategy 3: Preach each of the ten selected texts over a four –month period.

Evaluation for Goal 1: will survey 30% of the congregation to measure the level of their awareness of biblical leadership.

Goal 2: To develop a leadership council within the church composed of the presidents of each auxiliary for the purpose of aligning them with the pastor’s vision, facilitate communication, and enhance leadership skills.

Strategy 1: Present this proposal at the church’s quarterly business meeting.

Strategy 2: Schedule monthly meetings in advance to be included in the church calendar

Strategy 3: Plan a monthly agenda of topics and issues to be addressed regarding leadership skill enhancement, vision alignment, and discussion of auxiliary concerns.

Evaluation of Goal 2: Distribute a survey to 30% of the focus group to provide feedback on my leadership abilities.

Goal 3: Honoring the Predecessor for fifty years of pastoral leadership

Strategy 1: Plan intentional ways to include the previous pastor in the life of the congregation

Strategy 2: Meet with the pastor emeritus to discuss the areas of involvement

Strategy 3: Implement the selected strategies discussed in the context of the worship service

Evaluation of Goal 3: Selected observations following implementation of strategies.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What Biblical passages speak to the area of authority?

Research Question 2: What is the nature of Authority?

Research Question 3: What has been the history of the Black Church in terms of Leadership and Transition?

Ministerial Competencies

Competency 1: Pastor/Shepherd – welcomes, encourages and involves newcomers; cherishes and nurtures long-time members; seeks contact with inactive members

Strategy 1: Research the biblical theme of hospitality; develop a plan to reach out to those who visit the church; identify a ministry to carry this plan out.

Strategy 2: Identify 3 existing ministries within the church where there was a need to re-examine their roles and purposes; select appropriate training resources implement training.

Strategy 3: Research biblical theme of honoring and caring for elders; planning intentional ways of reaching out to homebound members.

Evaluation of Competency 1: Evaluate effectiveness of training utilizing brief interviews of thirty percent of participants

Competency 2: Leader – an ability to communicate an overall sense of direction and to enable others to accomplish it.

Strategy 1: Articulating the vision for how the individual ministry meetings should operate.

Strategy 2: Creating a template that would assist the ministries in structuring and recording the contents of their meetings.

Strategy 3: Explaining the template to the group and distributing for their use.

Evaluation of Competency 2: Reviewing the minutes of each ministry meeting.

Competency 3: Spiritual Leader – to be attentive to the spiritual journey of the ongoing relationship with God of both one's self and those in one's pastoral care.

Strategy 1: To engage in a biblical reflection on leadership transitions

Strategy 2: To seek spiritual guidance from pastors who have been in leadership over a period of time.

Strategy 3: To attend a ministerial conference where open dialogue and training can occur.

TIMELINE/BUDGET

Date	Task/Activity	Tools/Necessary to Complete the Task	Person responsible	Budgetary Considerations/Cost	Source of Funding
2/2016	Proposal Approval by				
3/2016-3/2018	Research and Writing	Laptop, paper, books, online journals and books	EM	Books (\$100)	
3/2016	Competency 3 Strategy 1	Research biblical texts on Leadership transitions			
3/2016	Goal 3 Strategy 1	Met with Site Team to discuss ways to include Pastor Emeritus in church service.			
3/2016	Goal 3 Strategy 2	Met with Pastor Emeritus and discussed functions to carry out during our worship service and in the absence of Pastor.			
3/2016 – Present 1 st Sundays	Goal 3 Strategy 3	Pastor Emeritus gave altar prayer/Assist w/communion	EM		
3/2016	Goal 1 Strategy 1	Met with Site Team to plan preaching series - looked for subjects pertaining to needs of church	Site team EM		
3/2016-6/2016	Competency 1 Strategy 2	Con't meeting with Sun School teachers/improving strategies for teaching Bible. Chart, easel, chart paper, Bible, 21 st . <i>Cent. Teaching Strategies</i>	EM	\$10/book	Teachers paid for their own books
3/2016 - present	Goal 2 Strategy 1	Held Quarterly meeting with Joint Bd. and	EM		

		with Church membership (discussed Leadership Council)			
3/2016 – present	Competency 1 Strategy 2	Met with Men’s Ministry monthly (except August)	EM		
4/2016	Competency 3 Strategy 2	Discuss leadership transition with seasoned pastors (via phone, in person)			
4/2016	Goal 2 Strategy 2	Met with church clerk to plan dates for Leadership meetings.			
4/2016-6/2016	Goal 1 Strategy 2	Researched biblical texts for each subject for sermon series	EM		
4/2016 - present (6x year)	Goal 2 Strategy 3	Met with Leadership Council and emphasized evangelism as part of each ministry	EM		
4/2016 - present (6x year)	Competency 1 Strategy 2	Met with Ministerial Staff – e.g. Consider locales in which to minister e.g. nursing home	EM		
4/2016	Competency 1 Strategy 3	<i>Seniors Seminar</i> – (Guest speaker) Resources, housing benefits, planning, caregivers	Team member		Donation by attendees
5/2016 – 9/2016 (Excluding August)	Goal 1 Strategy 3	Preached Leadership sermon series pertaining to Christian Servant/leader, Christian character and stewardship	EM		
5/2016	Competency 1 Strategy 1	Researched biblical themes on <i>hospitality</i>	EM		
5/2016	Competency 3 Strategy 3	Registered for Hampton Minister’s Conference (included wife)	EM	Registration fee/room \$695.00	EM Donation of \$350 from Pastor’s Aide
6/2016	Competency 1	Met with church to discuss vision for	EM		

	Strategy 1	hospitality ministry			
		Devised a meeting and minutes format shared to be shared with ministries.			
6/2016	Competency 3 Strategy 3	Attended Hampton Minister's Conference (Leadership seminars) with spouse	EM	Gas/Tolls \$150 Food (3meals) \$360	EM
6/2016 – (present as needed)	Goal 3 Strategy 3	Pastor Emeritus conducted Wednesday night Prayer Service and Bible Study in pastor's absence	EM		
7/2016 (to present as needed)	Goal 3 Strategy 3	Pastor Emeritus assigned to fill pulpit in absence of Pastor. (family reunion)	EM		
7/2016	Goal 3 Strategy 3	Allowed Pastor Emeritus to preach for Men's Day AM service.	EM		
9/2016	Met with advisor		EM	Mass Transit Carfare	Personal
9/2016 – 12/2016	Competency 1 Strategy 2	Con't meeting with Sun School teachers/improving strategies for teaching the Bible.	EM		
9/2016	Competency 2 Strategy 1	Met with Site team to discuss how ministries should format meetings – including minutes to be goal oriented.			
10/2016	Competency 2 Strategy 2	Designed standard outline/format for taking minutes during ministry business meetings.			
10/2016	Competency 2 Strategy 3	Met with Leadership Council and shared how ministry meetings should be conducted and distributed model of minute's format.			

11/2016	Goal 3 Strategy 3	Pastor Emeritus was allowed to preach for Church Anniversary for the pastor	EM		
12/2016 - Present	Competency 1 Strategy 3	Periodically sent out holiday cards to all members and “Get Well Soon” to those on sick list.			
1/2017	Goal 2 Strategy 3	Workshop on Evangelism (flyers) Guest speaker – provided materials	Team member		Donation by attendees
7/2017	Research	Attended class History of the African American Church at NYTS		Tuition/books \$250	EM
8/2017	Goal 3 Strategy 3	Pastor Emeritus assigned to fill pulpit in absence of Pastor.(funeral)			
9/2017	Met with advisor			Mass Transit Carfare	Personal
4/2017 8/2017 9/2017	Goal 2 Strategy 3	Workshops on Evangelism – Guest Speaker - Bible tracts	Team member	\$35	Free/Donated by Site team members
10/2017	Met with advisor		EM	Mass Transit Carfare	Personal
2/2018	Met with advisor		EM	Mass Transit Carfare	Personal
2/2018	Goal 3 Strategy 3	Pastor Emeritus assigned to fill pulpit in absence of Pastor. (funeral)	EM		
3/201	Goal 1,2 Strategy 3	Survey given to sample of membership	Site team		
3/2018	Goal 3 Strategy 3	Pastor Emeritus assigned to fill pulpit in absence of Pastor. (family wedding)	EM		

Appendix B: Survey of Members

Survey of Members of Community Baptist (sample) *Rev. Eric Magwood*

1. Which age bracket do you fall in: Youth under 12 __ Youth under 18__ 18-25 __ 25-50 __ 50-65 __ over 65 __
 2. How long have you been a member of this church? _____
 - a) How long under former pastor? _____
 - b) How long under the current pastor? _____
 3. a) Are you a leader? _____
 - b) Are you a member only (Someone has not joined any ministries or auxiliaries)? _____
 - c) Are you a member of a ministry? ____ (Specify) _____
 4. Has your pastor defined where he is leading the church?
 5. a) Is the pastor leading by example? _____
 - b) Is the pastor leading through his teaching and/or preaching? _____
 6. Are you beginning to understand where the pastor is leading the church?

 7. Have you observed any change/improvements/growth?

 8. How have you changed?

 9. What do you suggest should be included in the pastor's vision for the church?

 10. Additional Comments:

- Name (Optional) _____

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